OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™



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RON GILBERT REMEMBERS

"I would not be who I am today without Lucasfilm Games"

"I remember showing Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade to Steven Spielberg, as George Lucas chipped in"

NOAH FALSTEIN ON BRAINSTORMING HITS

LUCAS Arts

A Celebration

"It felt like going to school, only we were getting paid to be there"

LARRY AHERN REVISITS HIS EARLY WORK DAYS

Also in this issue…

- NBA JAM
- BBC MICRO
- MICROSOFT
- IK+
- NIBBLER
- ATARI 8-BIT
- DOCTOR WHO
- STARFOX
- CRUSADER: NO REMORSE
- NEO GEO X
- GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
- FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

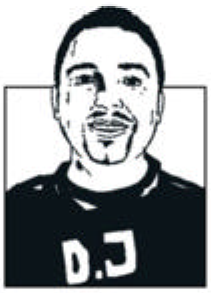
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ISSUE 116



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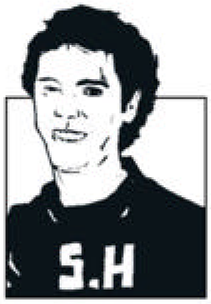
THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE LUCASARTS GAME



DARRAN JONES

I love Indiana Jones and *Fate Of Atlantis* is easily his best videogame. My wife loved playing it as well.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Half-Life 2
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

No question, *Maniac Mansion*. It's a superb and seminal adventure game with great characters and humour.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Tomb Raider
Favourite game of all time:
Tomb Raider



PAUL DRURY

Their early stuff – the robotic rugby of *Ballblazer* and the brilliant *Rescue On Fractalus!* Anxiously waiting for that knock on your spaceship's door is a cherished C64 memory.
Expertise:
Marathon gaming toilet arrangements
Currently playing:
Crysis 3
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



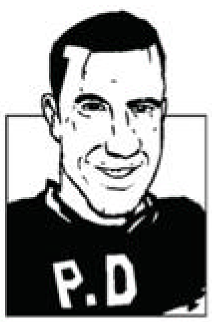
JASON KELK

Rescue On Fractalus! on the Atari 8-bit was seriously addictive and technically impressive with it.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Qix (Apple II)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



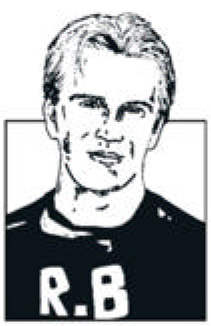
DAVID CROOKES

Grim Fandango is the only game I'm dying to see ported to the iPad, if only so more people can experience the sophisticated writing and stylised visuals of this Tim Schafer classic.
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx
Currently playing:
Candy Crush (yeah, I know)
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DAVIES

Does *Maniac Mansion* count? If not, the first *Star Wars* game for GameCube, which was amazing!
Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall.
Currently playing:
Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



RICHARD BURTON

Loom. A charming game set in a beautifully constructed world with a dark edgy atmosphere. It was original with its audio tape prologue and a touchingly written story… oh, and that ending…
Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Universal Military Simulator
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



IAIN LEE

Star Wars: Episode 1: Racer. Wonderfully exciting race game based on a film I've never seen.
Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live
Currently Playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC B version)

LOADING...



It's always sad when a major software label you loved passes away. The loss of LucasArts is particularly galling, and I'm sure I'm not the only person to be saddened by its loss. Yes, there was a bigger focus on *Star Wars* games during its twilight years, but it was a bastion of gaming brilliance during the Lucasfilm Games era. I'll never forget the first time I witnessed *The Eidolon*, or got scared by a Jaggi in *Rescue On Fractalus!* I can still remember gingerly changing the dial-a-pirate protection system for *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and the sheer lunacy of *Sam & Max Hit The Road*. I always imagined that the developers were almost having as much fun creating these games as I was playing them, and our huge celebration feature proves this theory was right.

LucasArts pioneered the way we played point-and-click adventure games, and allowed us to explore one of the richest sci-fi universes of all time. Many of its key staff went on to fill important roles within the entertainment industry, and it leaves behind a legacy that's impossible to ignore. Ron Gilbert muses in his opening article that there may never be another studio quite like LucasArts. I'm inclined to agree with him.

Enjoy the magazine,



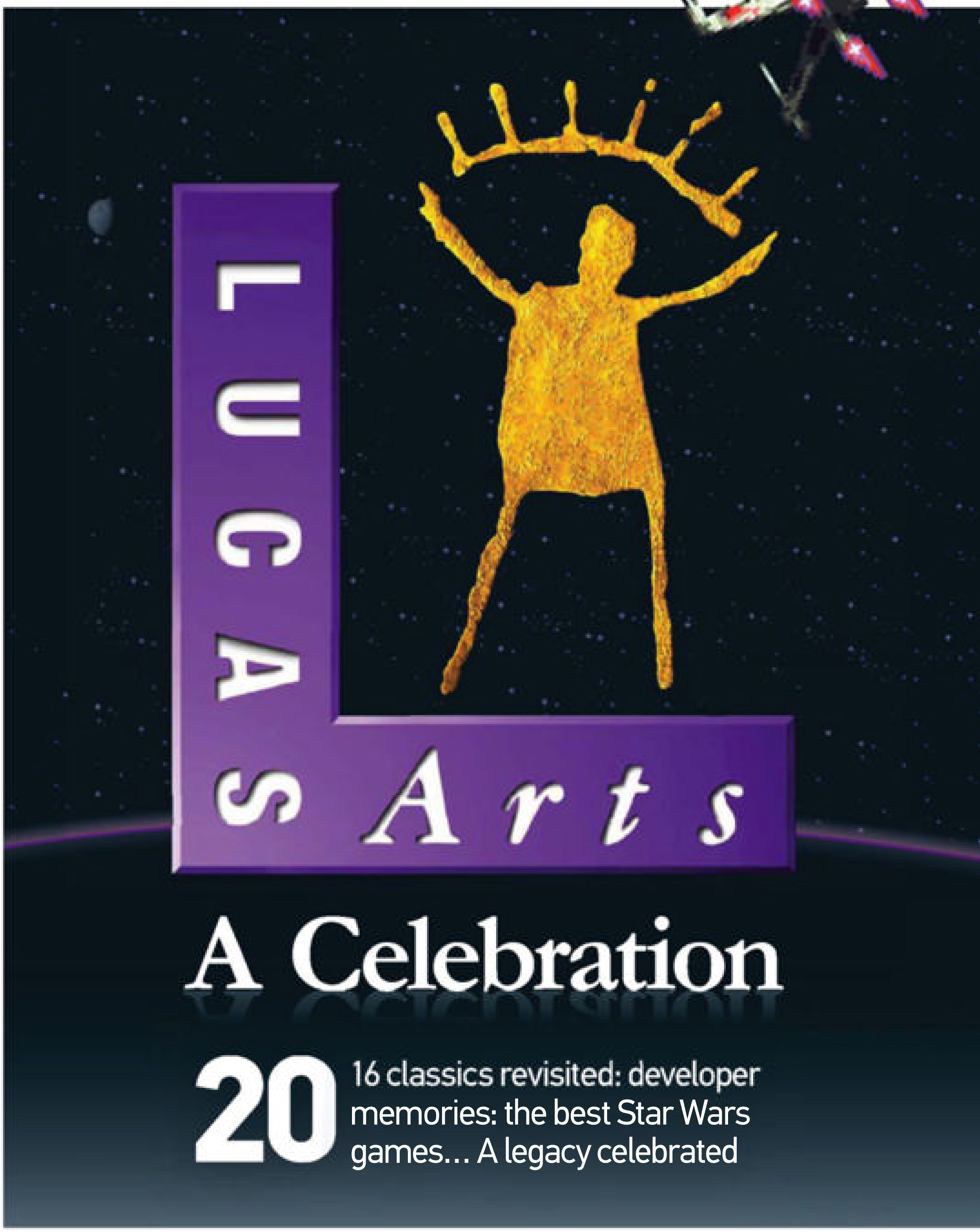


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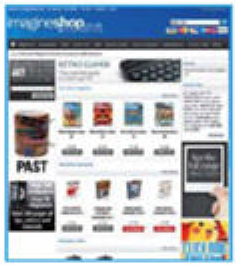




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" It's still the coolest of the GTA games "

Samuel Roberts



80 Future Classic

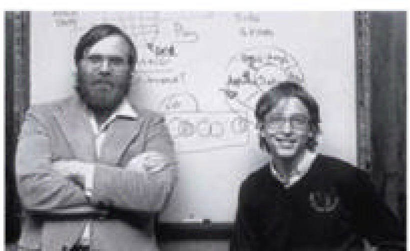
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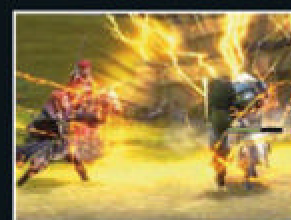
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How Bill Gates's company has been subtly shaping the games industry

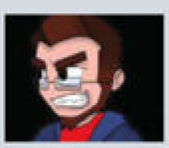
ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





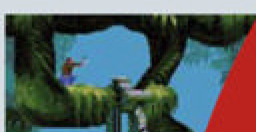
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



18 FLASHBACK

As a new remake gets announced, reader James Langstone explains why his cherished Amiga version is still the best one to play





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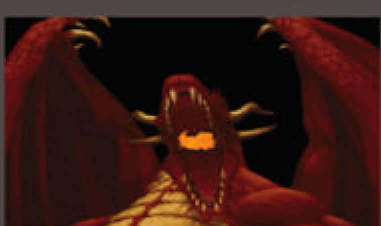
>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> It's been a busy month for retro, so much so that we've introduced a brand new section so that we can fit all our news in. Let's kick off though with a look at three exciting new remakes from Capcom and Ubisoft

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> "We've added a ton of extras, but we've worked hard to keep the core gameplay"



EXCLUSIVE INSIGHT ON THE HOTTEST NEW REMAKES

DEVELOPERS DISCUSS HOW THEY ARE BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO PAST HITS

This summer is certainly shaping up to be a real scorcher for retro gamers, with HD remakes of three classic games coming to PSN and Xbox Live Arcade.

Platformer lovers have it best with HD updates of NES classic *DuckTales* and the superb 16-bit classic *Flashback*, but fight fans also have cause to celebrate with Capcom announcing the digital release of its acclaimed beat-'em-up series *Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles Of Mystara* for various home systems.

DuckTales is being developed by WayForward Technologies, a studio with an excellent track record when it comes to handling retro games with kid gloves – having impressed with the excellent *Contra 4*, and following that up with *A Boy And His Blob and Double Dragon: Neon*. The studio's version of *DuckTales* will be a retelling of the original 1989 NES platformer, but with an embellished story, remixed soundtrack, new areas to explore, hand-drawn visuals and the vocal talents of the original cartoon voice actors. Needless to say, fans of the hit series are already anticipating the game's release, which will be sometime this summer.

And if all that wasn't enough to get you feeling like it's the Nineties all over again, Ubisoft has announced that it is teaming up with Paul Cuisset's studio VictorCell for a HD reimagining of his cinematic platformer *Flashback*. Developed by the original *Flashback* team, this exciting update will introduce brand new gameplay sections and story elements to make the new version closer to their original vision for the game.

So what exactly can fans expect from these updates? Well, we got straight on the case of trying to add some meat to the emaciated body of information, and are happy to report back that we have all this insight to share with you.

» [PS3] We're very optimistic about *DuckTales: Remastered*. WayForward has so far impressed us with *A Boy And His Blob* (Wii), *Contra 4* and *Double Dragon: Neon*.



DuckTales: Remastered

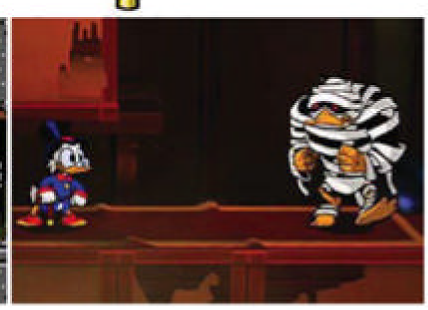
>> Capcom producer Derek Neal on how the firm is remastering its NES classic...

How does it feel going back to such a loved game?
It's an amazing feeling, to be honest. Personnel on all sides at Capcom, Disney and at WayFoward are big fans of the NES game and the show. To say 'big fans' is actually a little bit of a disservice… In our groups, there are some uber fans who redefine what dedication is. The love that we all have for this franchise is translating to a title that has extreme attention to detail [and] will be faithful to both the NES original and the show.

What enhancements will *DuckTales: Remastered* offer over the original NES game?
The most obvious enhancement is the graphics. All of the character animations are created using individually hand-drawn cells that are animated using contemporary 2D animation programs. *DuckTales: Remastered* will also feature new backgrounds inspired from the show, fully voiced VO work (with some of the original show actors) and remastered music. On the game side, the title will feature some tweaks to the level design to improve flow, as well as three new areas. The beginning level will serve as a tutorial and the introduction of the story, a hub level that includes the game gallery and the ability to swim in Scrooge's money bin, and finally an all-new final level that will lead to the final boss.







Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles Of Mystara Collection

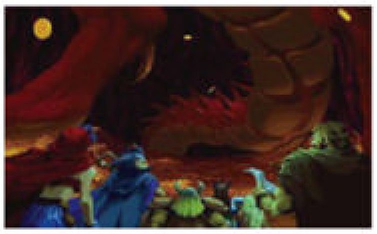


>> Capcom producer Derek Neal on the new elements the team is introducing...

Why has it taken so long for this excellent scrolling fighter to reappear?
Capcom has a huge library of classic games, each with a strong fan following. It seems like every one of those games has a horde of fans who want them to come back, and we're doing our best to answer those calls. It sometimes takes a while for that to happen because we don't want to just rush these things to market; we want to create a package that will truly do justice to the game's legacy. With *Dungeons & Dragons: Chronicles Of Mystara*, for example, we're giving fans way more than just some port.

What improvements will this offer over the Saturn version?
We've added a ton of extras, but we've also worked very hard to keep the core gameplay the same. For example, the graphics have been lovingly upscaled, and we've added a bunch of dynamic challenges, alongside a giant vault full of unlockable content. We've also added four-player online co-op play, and a new suite of game options we're calling 'House Rules'. The House Rules let you change up the experience so that every play-through feels different.

How important is online play?
We really wanted to get the online play right, so a lot of time has been spent making it awesome. Players can drop in and out of games seamlessly, just like at the arcade, with up to four players working together at any one time. We also use a special middleware called GGPO to hide lag, which helps ensure that the experience online is always smooth. Finally, this game was actually built using the network architecture from *Marvel Vs Capcom: Origins* and *Darkstalkers Resurrection*, which fans have called "the best netcode of any fighting games to date." You can expect the same kind of quality here.


» [Arcade] Currently, the only way to play Capcom's *D&D* games is to buy the coin-ops or a Sega Saturn and its now rare and costly Japanese conversion.

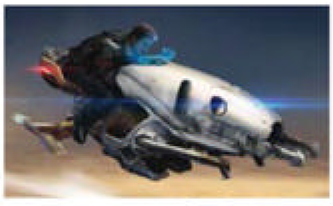
Flashback

>> Flashback's Simon Mackenzie on returning to the series...

Why are you remaking *Flashback*?
Technology has advanced so much that we're now able to make the game as the team originally saw it in their heads back in the day. We also wanted to tell more stories in this universe and to do this we needed to introduce a whole new generation to *Flashback* and bring it up to speed for modern audiences.

What's it like working again with a lot of the original team?
Amazing! *Flashback* had always been special to all of us; there was a real camaraderie on the project. Everyone was pretty excited to rework on *Flashback*, to find ways to improve it. It's very rare in this industry to be able to give a second youth to a game so long after.

What improvements will it offer over the original game?
Our first objective was to remain faithful to the spirit of the original game, but to also take full advantage of the computing power of today's machines. Quite a few points were considered to bring the game up to standards. The first was obviously in the graphics department. We also gave a facelift to the gameplay by making it more reactive and dynamic, the reactivity and instinctive control of Conrad being two points that we really take to heart. We also integrated an experience progression system for the character and his equipment, with upgrades that can be found throughout the various levels. Accessibility was brought up to current standards, as was the level design that would seem rather punishing through today's lenses if we had kept it exactly as it was. All in all, though, we're extremely happy with the result. We feel we were able to keep *Flashback*'s soul and put it into a new body. We also have some new weapons and gadgets that will let you approach situations differently.




» *Flashback*'s reimagining is being developed by the game's original creators, including game designer Paul Cuisset.

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Forum members discuss the new remakes

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

"Love playing DuckTales and after watching the release video I have to say that it does look nice and I am very tempted to get it" dste

"I would rather see a [Flashback] sequel rather than a remake, to be honest. While there is much to admire in the original and its art style, it feels very much of its time and should stay that way" merman

"I just hope that this update of D&D means Capcom will revisit more of their CPS2 back catalogue, most notably Captain Commando and Cadillacs & Dinosaurs!" Joey

"Like others, I would have preferred some nice updated 2D HD artwork, rather than the 2.5D polygon-based one we are getting. Also, I am guessing that this version [of Flashback] will be much more 'action' orientated than the original" learnedrobb

retro columns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Social snaking

I feel a bit queer. I've just deleted my Facebook account. I literally just did it about two minutes ago. I've gone all light-headed and a bit shaky. I feel a migraine coming on. I wasn't expecting this at all.

Why am I doing this? Well, last week I had a whole day hanging out with my two boys. And I mean my actual sons, not my homies. They were chatting and playing and showing me all the wonderful things of mine they had broken. And I was too busy updating my Facebook status to give them the attention they deserved. Shameful. These social media sites are like a fine heroin – so very moreish and ultimately pointless.

But it doesn't end there. I'm taking this whole 'off-the-grid' thing one stage further. I'm going to *try* and get rid of my iPhone 5. I genuinely think I am addicted to it. So, this week I have a Nokia 3410 on its way. All it does is take calls, send texts and play *Snake*.

Will any of this last? I'm not sure. I'm already cheating a bit with FB in that I've set up a dead account, ie one under a pseudonym that I will never use but need it to run my 'fan' page. I can use that to let people know when I've written a new column for **Retro Gamer** and other worky things like that. But that's it.

As for the phone, I'm really looking forward to this. It will take me back to when life was simpler, easier, less stressful. Being unable to receive emails every minute will be frustrating at first, but I'm looking forward to the tranquillity that will ultimately come. I'm going to have two email windows in my day when I can read and reply to people. One in the morning, one before bed. And that will be it.

I'm also really looking forward to playing *Snake*. I used to love it. We all did. It was a phenomenon that's been overlooked in retro gaming history. I had a very similar game on my Dragon that I typed in from a magazine: *Tron Light Cycles*. This was in the day when film licensing wasn't such a big thing and lawyers hadn't been invented. You could whack a film title on any game and make a few quid out of it – even if it had nothing to do with the movie.

Snake worked because it was so simple. The controls were *Pac-Man* style basic and the premise was too – get more points than you did last time. None of the fancy tricks of *Angry Birds* or *GTA* that are so readily available on your iPhone these days.

The problem is that it is *so* addictive. My worry is that the next time my oldest lad wants to play pirates, I'll be trying to beat my score of 96 on *Snake*. 'Yeah, you go and start, daddy will be with you soon, he's just doing some important work.'

the wall

» EVERYTHING THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN THE WORLD OF RETRO THIS MONTH



LINK RETURNS

DEVELOPER THOUGHTS ON NINTENDO'S NEW ZELDA GAME

A sequel to one of the greatest *Zelda* games of all time, *A Link To The Past*, will be hitting the 3DS later this year. Nintendo revealed the surprise announcement at its latest Nintendo Direct event.

Nintendo is staying tight-lipped about the game, but has said that it will feature new dungeons within the same world as the 16-bit original. One of the most interesting reveals is Link's new ability to go paper thin, allowing him to sneak along walls and reach otherwise inaccessible areas. The dungeons themselves are also going to be far bigger in scope than before, with one showing 13 floors.

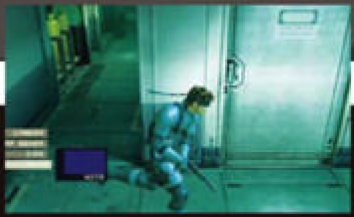
Another interesting aspect of *A Link To The Past 2* is its slightly skewed top-down viewpoint. While we're not huge fans of this approach, it's clearly been done to get the most out of the machine's unique 3D capabilities.

Blitz Entertainment's Wil Overton is a big fan of *Zelda*, having drawn numerous magazine covers over the years (including **Retro Gamer**) but is finding it hard to get excited about Nintendo's announcement. "I can't say I've been a fan of Ninty's recent 3D reimagining of old 2D graphics," he tells us. "The *New Super Mario Bros* titles look a bit soulless to me and I got the same feeling from the brief clip of *A Link To The Past 2* (please, please don't call it that). I guess that I'd hoped for something a bit more radical for the 3DS's first original *Zelda* and it does seem rather churlish to start moaning at the first little glimpse of what, I imagine, will be a really solid title, but I wasn't wowed in the way I wanted to be."

While it's a sentiment we share in parts, we do like Nintendo's new approach of simply dropping games out of the blue, as it reminds us of the good old days. Here's hoping Link's first 3D adventure turns out to be just as impressive as Mario's was.



» [3DS] Link's ability to go 2D looks excellent and already promises plenty of potential going forward.



METAL GEAR LEGACY

After all the confounding revelations concerning *Metal Gear V* (which was revealed to be both *The Phantom Pain* and *Ground Zeroes*), Konami has now revealed a brand new *Metal Gear Solid* compilation.

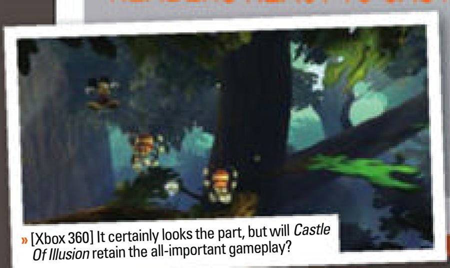
Metal Gear Solid: The Legacy Collection will be released in June and will include all four *Metal Gear Solid* games, as well as *Peace Walker* and *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions*. It will also include two Ashley Wood digital novels. Although Konami hasn't revealed a Western date for the PlayStation 3 exclusive, we'd imagine it can't be too far away.

MORE FROM NINTENDO

In addition to its *A Link To The Past 2*, Nintendo revealed several other new games for the Wii U and 3DS. *Yoshi's Island* looks like a worthy successor to the SNES original (although its graphical style is dividing the office) while *Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D* is a remake of the 2010 Wii game. Other interesting nuggets included *Mario Golf: World Tour, Mario And Donkey Kong: Minis On The Move* and a brand new *Mario Party*, which will offer 81 new mini-games and augmented reality features. Nintendo also revealed that *Bravely Default* and *Shin Megami Tensei IV* would receive Western localisations.

EPIC MICKEY?

READERS REACT TO CASTLE OF ILLUSION REMAKE



» [Xbox 360] It certainly looks the part, but will *Castle Of Illusion* retain the all-important gameplay?

In addition to being hit with Nintendo's exciting news of a new *Zelda* this month, Sega has also delivered a 16-bit nostalgia salvo of its own. It recently revealed that *Castle Of Illusion* was being remade for PS3, Xbox 360 and PC, something we are massively excited about.

Castle Of Illusion was one of the Mega Drive's defining games, delivering fantastic graphics, beautiful tunes and cleverly designed stages. The news is going down well with readers, with forum member Grizzly stating, "Naturally excited about this. All I hope is that if it's a HD remake they at least add the original 16-bit version in there, just in case the new stuff is pap." TheNewMonkey is also happy, saying, "Screenshots look nice, hopefully it will run nice and smooth." ALK, on the other hand, is looking to the future, musing: "[It will] be interesting to see how far this line of Disney HD remakes go. Online co-op *World Of Illusion* please."

More news from Sega soon.

PLUTO RISING

BRAND NEW SEGA SATURN VARIANT APPEARS



The retro community was set ablaze recently when Super Magnetic, a member of Assembler Games, revealed an unknown Sega Saturn variant that he'd been sitting on for 14 years via Assembler's community forum. Super Magnetic, who does not wish to be named, was working at Sega during the Dreamcast period when he was giving the rare oddity, and he's kept it in a box ever since. He recently announced the revelation on Assembler and displayed numerous pictures of the highly desirable console.

The Pluto is essentially a Sega Saturn with built-in NetLink, so it's not a brand new console, but is instead a variant that never went into full production. Amazingly, within days of Super Magnetic making his reveal, another model (said to be found at a flea market for $1) went up for sale on GameGavel, eventually reaching $7,600 before being relisted).

Super Magnetic is keeping quiet about what he has planned for his own machine, but he did tell us why he feels it has generated such an amazing amount of interest. "Sega had hits and misses, but the hits were some of the best consoles ever made, in my opinion. The Pluto shows where Sega's mindset was at the time, making strides in the online space well before the competitors. That's what makes it fascinating to the community, I think."

MOST EXCITED ABOUT... EARTHBOUND

Nintendo recently dropped the bombshell that revered SNES game *Earthbound* would be heading to the Virtual Console. *Earthbound*'s reputation for being a superb RPG has seen its price constantly push £500 for a complete version, so this is brilliant news for those who can't justify the high price tag it currently sells for online.



I'M GONNA WATCH IT



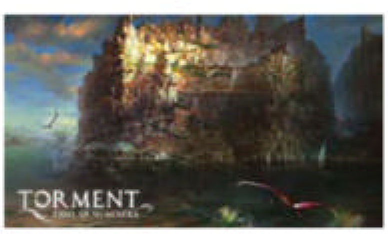
Disney has revealed that *Wreck-It Ralph* will soon be available to own on Blu-ray and DVD. The hit film stars John C Reilly as the titular Ralph, a huge, clumsy character with a heart of gold who has been playing the bad guy in a *Donkey Kong*-style videogame for the past 30 years and wants nothing more than to be considered a hero by his peers. Directed by Rich Moore, it's filled with plenty of references to classic videogames, ranging from *Final Fantasy VII* and *Street Fighter* to a prominent role by Q*bert, and should please the young and old alike.

TORMENT FUNDED

***Torment: Tides Of Numenera*, the spiritual successor to *Planescape: Torment* has hit its Kickstarter funding target.**

The developer inXile Entertainment was asking for $900,000, but the project eventually finished on a colossal $4,188,927, meaning original *Planescape: Torment* writer Chris Avellone is now on board as well and will be designing and writing a new character for the game.

Planescape: Torment is widely regarded as one of the greatest Western RPGs of all time, so *Tides Of Numenera* has a lot to live up to. It won't be available until 2015, meaning there's plenty of time for inXile to work its magic.



retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Neo Retro ?

Sometimes I can't help grinning because I'm living in a world that's more incredible than my teen-self could dream about at school. At the same time, it is rapidly becoming quaint and curious.

In 1983, when all we had to go off was *The Hobbit* from Melbourne House and Ultimate's *Jetpac*, the farthest my mind's eye could see was stuff like this but looking like a painting on the box. So, for me, every big leap forward in gaming is a gift that I treasure rather than pulling things to pieces.

On the brink of PlayStation 4 and the new Xbox, I was recently struck by the fact PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 are fast approaching retro status. As such, I've taken a different view to them, much friendlier and appreciative of what they uniquely offer. Earlier on in their life cycles I'd strongly favour or dismiss one or the other for mostly fickle reasons. Now that I'm applying my retro way of thinking to present-day pros and cons, I'm feeling much more relaxed about everything.

Retro collectors might dedicate a weekend to savouring the best and worst of, say, the 8-bit era. This is non-judgemental, sparked by pure fascination at the use of technology and style of presentation, from the hardware itself to the images on screen and associated press ads. In a way, it's like holding a mirror to ourselves from a point in time, so all kinds of other nostalgic associations creep in too.

What if we just freeze the moment that we're in right now and take a look around in the same way?

Recently I joked about the lack of aggressive defending of our chosen gaming machines in recent times. This month I'm going to plead that we drop the pitchforks and appreciate what we've got… because it is seriously amazing and *fun*. We have four-player co-op in *Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate* on 3DS – a handheld console with a 3D display, communicating with another device via an invisible connection. I can take part in Ridley Scott-style sci-fi or Tolkien-esque scenarios together with friends online via Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3. I can use the same save file for a game that looks identical on PS3 and PS Vita (*Guacamelee!*), deciding whether or not to play it on the TV or the handheld.

Gaming is simultaneously one huge WTF moment, while at the same time as endearing as a little kid making its first attempts to climb a flight of stairs… not thinking how it might get down again.

My 13-year-old mind, I'll admit seldom distant from the surface, finds modern gaming tech truly astonishing. My grown-up self is realising that this is a relay race, not some WWE Battle Royal, in which no one company ever gets the generational leap exactly right.

We're going to look back at PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 years from now, informed by what PlayStation 4 and the new Xbox became, and appreciate the sincerity of intension while poking gentle fun at cool ideas in their infancy. Retro Gamer will provide the best deconstruction of these times, because it sees gaming as a creative endeavour more than an industry.

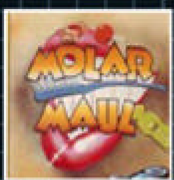
Be glad that you're in the good company of the enlightened guys in charge here.



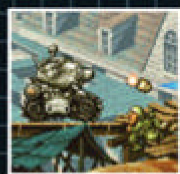
23 May – 20 June

retrodiary

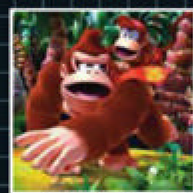
>> A month of retro events both past and present



23 May 1983
■ Imagine Software releases *Molar Maul* and *Ah Diddums* for the ZX Spectrum. A little over a year later, Imagine had been liquidated…



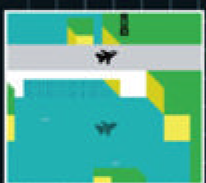
24 May 1996
■ Run-and-gun classic *Metal Slug* is released by Nazca Corporation on the Neo Geo home console.



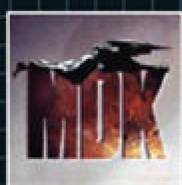
24 May 2013
■ *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is due for release on Nintendo's 3DS handheld console across Europe.

25 May 1984
■ *Psytron* by Beyond Software is released on the ZX Spectrum. It went on to receive a Crash Smash.





31 May 1984
■ Vortex Software releases Costa Panayi's 3D jet fighter game, *Tornado Low Level*, on the ZX Spectrum.



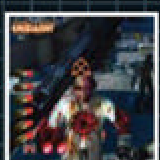
28 May 1998
■ Shiny Entertainment's enjoyable third-person shooter game *MDK* is released on the Macintosh.



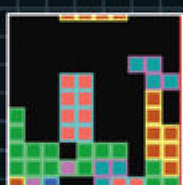
28 May 1983
■ *Pac & Pal*, a rare Japanese-only arcade coin-op by Namco, is released featuring Pac-Man and a new female friend, a green ghost called Miru.



26 May 2006
■ Rockstar Games shows its softer side with the European release of *Rockstar Table Tennis* on the Xbox 360.



1 June 2002
■ Sega's survival-horror, zombie blastathon *House Of The Dead III* is released into arcades.



6 June 1984
■ Alex Pajitnov releases his game *Tetris* in the USSR. It was exported, converted and sold rather well…

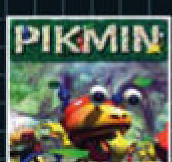


6 June 1992
■ Nintendo eventually releases its Super Nintendo console in countries other than the USA and Japan…

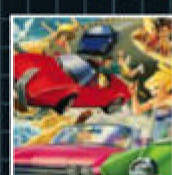


9 June 2000
■ *Bust-A-Move 4* (aka *Puzzle Bobble 4*) finally reaches UK shores when it is released on the Sega Dreamcast.

16 June 1983
■ Microsoft's attempt to create a single industry standard in home computing begins with its first announcement of the MSX format.



14 June 2002
■ Strategy and cutesy gaming collide when *Pikmin* is released in Europe on Nintendo's new GameCube.

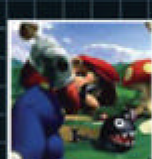


14 June 1994
■ Sega releases *OutRunners*, the third in the *Out Run* series, on its Genesis console in the USA and Japan.

11-13 June 2013
■ The Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) is being held at the Los Angeles Convention Center.



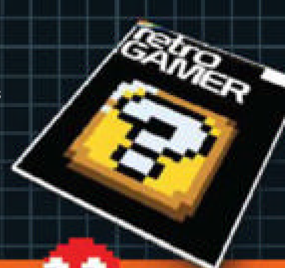
16 June 2000
Dolphin and Dreamcast combine for a new story in a new world in *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future*.



18 June 2004
■ *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour* gets its European release on the GameCube.



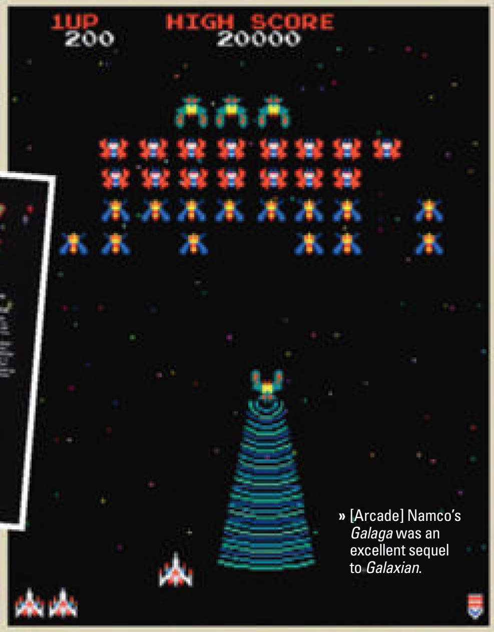
19 June 1983
■ Laserdisc videogaming arrives in arcades with the coin-op *Dragon's Lair*. It's gameplay continues to divide gamers to this day.



20 June 2013
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

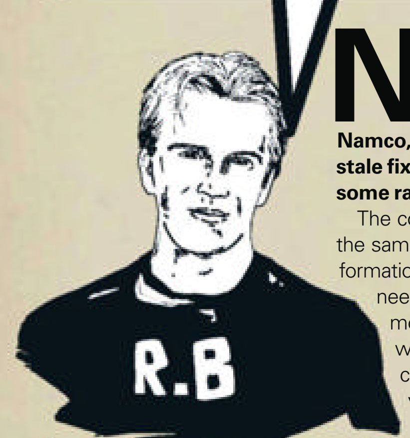




» [Arcade] Namco's *Galaga* was an excellent sequel to *Galaxian*.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1981

SEPTEMBER 1981 – Galaga invades arcades, Nintendo's Chef sells like hot cakes, Wizardry begins its quest, Coleco's Donkey Kong goes wrong and Activision cause a Stampede for Ice Hockey. Richard Burton pucks off…



New to arcades this month was *Galaga*, the eagerly awaited coin-op sequel to *Galaxian*. Developed and distributed by Namco, *Galaga* would help refresh the stale fixed shooter genre by means of some rather unique features.

The core of the game would remain the same with the usual swooping formations of bomb-dropping alien ships needing to be destroyed, but the most original new feature in *Galaga* was the ability of the aliens to capture your ship and use it against you. The boss alien ships would intermittently swoop down and engage a tractor beam. If you happened to fall into tractor beam range, your ship would become part of their fleet. It would react like a standard enemy which could shoot at you but also be destroyed by you.

You could retake your ship if you managed to shoot down the boss alien ship while it was in flight. Your fighter would then be returned – not as an extra life, but to join forces with your current fighter. You would become a larger target for the enemy but you would also have double the fire power – a neat risk-and-reward mechanic.

Galaga's shooting mechanics had also been tweaked with the new ability to shoot multiple times in quick succession; however, rapid fire was most definitely required with the speed and quantity of kamikaze enemies. It would also be useful with the newly introduced Challenging Stage which would appear every few levels and would essentially be a memory test as set patterns of non-firing alien fighters flew on screen and you had to dispatch them all for a healthy bonus.

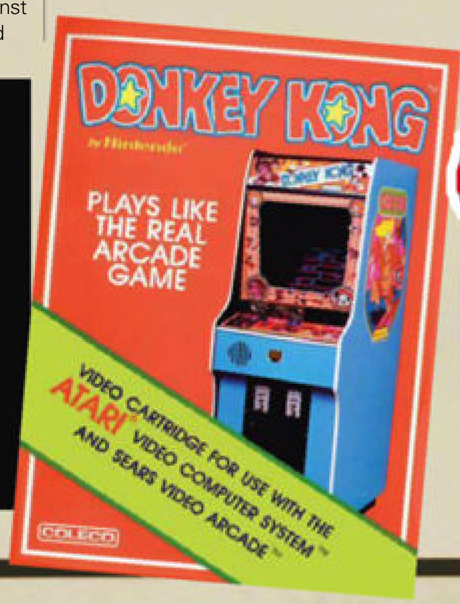
Galaga was a real shot in the arm for coin-op shoot-'em-ups and proved to be a massive success for Namco and also Midway, which took over the American distribution rights. The clamour for home versions of *Galaga* was immediate and it didn't take long for it to be ported to almost every popular home computer and console.

Pocket-sized electronic games were still doing very well, with Nintendo's Game & Watch series the current top seller. Nintendo's latest release was *Chef*. It saw you play the role of a chef who had to keep airborne several pieces of food by tossing them in his frying pan. If your sausage hit the floor then one of your three lives was lost.

Chef was one of a small handful of Game & Watch titles that sold extraordinarily well. In fact, it was the first in the Widescreen series to sell over a million units worldwide.



» [Atari 2600] *Donkey Kong* had to be recalled by Coleco. Oops.

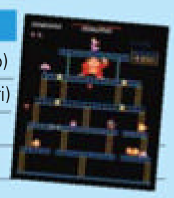


CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 1981

ARCADE

1 Donkey Kong (Nintendo)
2 Missile Command (Atari)
3 Pac-Man (Namco)
4 Centipede (Atari)
5 Phoenix (Centuri)



September saw the release of the first game in the long-running and much loved role-playing videogame franchise *Wizardry*. The snappily titled *Wizardry: Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlords* was released on the Apple II by Sir-Tech Software and became an instant worldwide hit.

What really made *Wizardry* so much fun to play was the ease with which the game could be picked up, yet without compromising its depth. The role-playing element was spot on and with the front-end interface a breeze to negotiate, the enjoyment of the game was never hampered by being overly complicated. It was instinctive and natural.

The only criticisms that could be levelled at *Wizardry* were that there was just the one dungeon and sometimes the ease and speed that your entire party of players could be wiped out was frustrating, particularly if you had invested several hours of gameplay in it.

Wizardry's graphics left a lot to be desired, being almost solely text based bar the inclusion of simple line-drawn dungeons and a static graphical representation of the monster, foe or object you were about to engage with, but that was acceptable. If anything, your imagination was allowed to run riot filling in the blanks and expanding the game beyond what it actually was. Maybe that's why *Wizardry* is held with such high regard. It's not just one of the most important role-playing games on the Apple II; it's one of the most important of all time.

Coleco was finding problems with its recent release of *Donkey Kong* on the Atari 2600. Older versions of the 2600 console were found to be incompatible with the cartridge and so Coleco recalled every *Donkey Kong* cartridge rather than wait for disgruntled owners to return the game. A Coleco spokesman estimated that tens of thousands of cartridges would need to be replaced.

Donkey Kong was part of Coleco's first wave of Atari 2600 releases, the other two games being *Venture* and *Carnival*. Coleco guaranteed that those two games were unaffected.

Activision, which was gaining a reputation for releasing quality Atari 2600 games, announced that it had two new titles almost ready for release: *Ice Hockey* and *Stampede*.

Ice Hockey was a simplified version of the sport with two-a-side teams – one goal minder and an attacker – taking on each other. While this sounds like a fatal design flaw, *Ice Hockey* was hugely entertaining. Control would switch between your two players automatically and you also had the ability to knock your opponent over with your stick.

Graphically it was excellent with clean, crisp graphics which were surprisingly well defined and animated. *Ice Hockey* was a good one-player game but was superb as a two-player affair and was arguably one of the best sports games released on the Atari 2600.

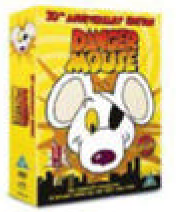
Stampede was, as the name suggests, a bovine-catching game. You played a cowboy who needed to herd and lasso all the cattle he encountered, with different types of cows worth differing amounts of points.

While *Stampede* was enjoyable in the short term, the gameplay got old very fast and with the likes of *Ice Hockey* to compete against, *Stampede* never really set the Atari 2600 world on fire.

SEPTEMBER WORLD NEWS

September proved to be quite a month for television programmes to debut.

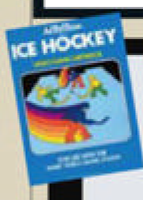
9 September saw *Only Fools And Horses* arrive on BBC1. Starring David Jason as dodgy cockney market trader Derek 'Del Boy' Trotter, hampered/assisted by his younger brother Rodney played by Nicholas Lyndhurst, the comedy sitcom followed their many get-rich schemes and would go on to become one of the UK's most popular programmes ever. It eventually ended in 1991 but ran for another 12 years with regular Christmas specials.



26 September would see the first outing of Game *For A Laugh*, hosted by Jeremy Beadle, Matthew Kelly, Sarah Kennedy and Henry Kelly, which involved setting up members of the public in large-scale practical jokes.

28 September would see the world of darts and games shows collide with *Bullseye*. Hosted by Jim Bowen, the much loved programme would see three pairs of contestants play darts and answer questions in the hope of playing the prize board and going on to take the gamble of scoring 101 or more with six darts. The star prize was often a speedboat or caravan… super, smashing, great!

Also debuting on the 28 September was *Danger Mouse*, a children's cartoon voiced by David Jason as Danger Mouse and Terry Scott as his sidekick Penfold, and there was more cult kid's television being unveiled with *Postman Pat* (and his black and white cat) making his first appearance on 16 September. It proved hugely popular and ran for 27 years.





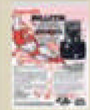
» [Atari 2600] *Ice Hockey* was fast and furious.



» [Apple II] Feeling the magic of *Wizardry*.

THIS MONTH IN...

ATARI OWNERS CLUB BULLETIN



The big news for UK Atari 2600 owners was that the conversion of *Asteroids* was finally here. Atari also released the Atari 400 and 800 home computers. However, you would require fairly deep pockets with them retailing at £345 and £645 respectively. Probably best to stick with *Asteroids* at £34.50…



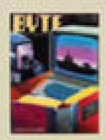
COIN CONNECTION



With the Atari World Championships but a month away and its newest coin-op *Centipede* chosen as the game for it, Atari announced the release of a cocktail cabinet variant of the arcade hit. With sales of *Centipede* upright cabinets soaring, the firm looked to squeeze arcade owners for a little more cash.



BYTE

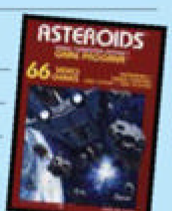


Byte took a look back at the 1981 National Computer Conference. Featuring computers like the TRS-80, Apple II and Commodore PET, the arena was seemingly populated mainly by older men with comb-overs and matching beards who wore predominantly beige corduroy jackets. Maybe it was the Clive Sinclair cosplay competition day?



ATARI 2600

1. Asteroids (Atari)
2. Missile Command (Atari)
3. Space Invaders (Atari)
4. Warlords (Atari)
5. Dragster (Activision)



ACORN ATOM

1. Atom Invaders (Bug-Byte)
2. Lunar Lander (Micro Power)
3. Invader Force (Micro Power)
4. Fruit Machine (Bug-Byte)
5. Games Pack 7 (Acornsoft)



MUSIC

1. Prince Charming (Adam & The Ants)
2. Tainted Love (Soft Cell)
3. Hands Up (Give Me Your Heart) – (Ottawan)
4. Souvenir (Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark)
5. Wired For Sound (Cliff Richard)



BACK TO THE NINETIES CHARTS



FEBRUARY 1996



SEGA SATURN

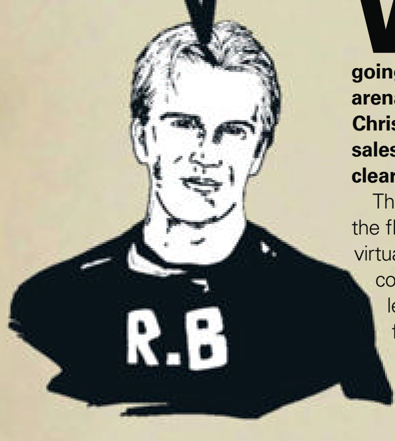
1. Virtua Fighter 2 (Sega)
2. FIFA Soccer '96 (Electronic Arts)
3. Firestorm: Thunderhawk 2 (Core Design)
4. Virtua Cop (Sega)
5. Daytona USA (Sega)



» [Sega Saturn] *Fighting Vipers* was a conversion of one of Sega's own coin-ops. However, as fighting games go, it lacked punch.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1996

MARCH 1996 – PlayStation vs Saturn, Tekken 2 beats the opposition, Fighting Vipers lacks venom, Mortal Kombat 3 is a no show, Galaxian 3 is all show and Parodius gets sexy. Richard Burton looks out for the bunny sisters Hikaru and Akane…



With the relative closeness of their launches, the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn were always going to be foes in the console sales arena. After a busy sales period through Christmas and into the New Year, the sales figures were being reported and a clear winner was emerging…

The PlayStation was seemingly wiping the floor with the Saturn, selling out in virtually every store that stocked it while copious quantities of the Saturn were left on the shelves. Explanations varied for the amazing PlayStation showing, but the main reason seemed to be software. The already bountiful catalogue of PlayStation titles, and the quality of the releases, overshadowed anything that Sega could promote.

Case in point was the newly released PlayStation conversion of Namco's arcade coin-op *Tekken 2*, itself a fairly new game having been out a mere six months. *Tekken 2* continued with the familiar fighting formula and game mechanics of its predecessor. The character polygon graphics remained, but were enhanced with some beautifully designed 2D backdrops. Also added were three new in-game modes: Team Battle, Time Attack and Survival.

What attracted many people to *Tekken 2* was the ease of playability, with character moves easy to learn. You could grab a controller and play for five minutes or get stuck in for a prolonged session, discovering special moves and new characters and unlocking the many hidden characters. The crisply defined fluid graphics and soundtrack made *Tekken 2* a must-have game for the PlayStation.

Sega had some interesting coin-op conversions of its own coming up – *Virtual On: Cyber Troopers* and *Fighting Vipers*. Of the fighting genre, these were presumably aimed at taking some of thunder away from *Tekken 2*. Sadly, both titles were only adequate in terms of graphics and gameplay, with *Virtual On* a sluggish robotic take-off of *Tekken* although it did have some nice additional weaponry features available to the players.

Fighting Vipers played like a poor man's version of *Virtua Fighter*. It had an industrialised look with urban-styled



» [PlayStation] Tough to convert from the coin-op, *Galaxian 3* was surprisingly good.



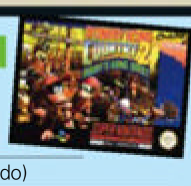
» [SNES] So close… 3DO and Atari Jaguar almost got a sniff of *Mortal Kombat 3*… before the plug was pulled.

MEGA DRIVE



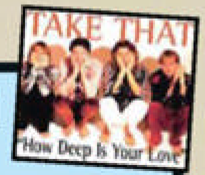
1. FIFA Soccer '96 (Electronic Arts)
2. Premier Manager (Sega)
3. Sonic & Knuckles (Sega)
4. Micro Machines '96 (Codemasters)
5. Mickey Mania (Sony)

SNES



1. Donkey Kong Country 2 (Nintendo))
2. Yoshi's Island (Nintendo)
3. Killer Instinct (Nintendo)
4. FIFA Soccer '96 (Electronic Arts)
5. Street Racer (Ubisoft)

MUSIC



1. How Deep Is Your Love (Take That)
2. Children (Robert Miles)
3. Don't Look Back In Anger (Oasis)
4. Firestarter (Prodigy)
5. Give Me A Little More Time (Gabrielle)

characters to play with, such as rockers, skateboarders and some scantily clad female fighters. There was also an interesting feature which saw players donning armour plating, but it just seemed overly fussy. *Fighting Vipers* was more playable that *Virtual On: Cyber Troopers* but still couldn't touch the PlayStation's *Tekken 2*.

The fighting games theme continued with news from Atari that Midway's much loved blood-fest *Mortal Kombat 3* was to be released on the Atari Jaguar. There was also good news for the much maligned 3DO system that an enhanced version of the game, entitled *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, was under development for that console. Both games had been high on the wish-lists of 3DO and Jaguar owners and it looked like the results were going to be outstanding.

Both versions were pencilled in for a summer release with early screenshots and cut-down playable demos available at trade shows indicating that the games could be exactly what the Jaguar and 3DO owners wanted. Disappointingly, however, the two titles suffered the same fate with development halted and both remained uncompleted and unreleased.

An old favourite was due to make another comeback, with Namco revealing that the PlayStation conversion of its



» [PlayStation] *Tekken 2* improved and honed areas of its predecessor, making it a superb beat-'em-up.

luxurious *Galaxian 3* arcade game was due for release next month. It would be hugely interesting to see how it managed to convert a six-player walk-in arcade machine that combines standard arcade hardware with two synchronised LaserDisc players to create amazing pre-rendered backgrounds.

The arcade coin-op game itself was an adaptation of the original 1990 theme park version which used 16 projectors for a full 360-degree display, had seating for 28 gamers and was housed in a fully hydraulic arena.

But what of the PlayStation conversion? Given the extraordinarily hard act it had to follow, Namco did a surprisingly good job. Up to four players could play simultaneously, but it only contained two missions. The premise of the game was that your auto-piloted ship would fly through space, with all gamers working co-operatively as gunners to finish the mission while individually trying to score the most points. The only drawback for *Galaxian 3* was that the missions were very short and could be completed in less than ten minutes, particularly with a full quota of friends on blasting duty.

Strangely, this is where the re-playability factor of *Galaxian 3* came in. With multiple players simultaneously competing for the best scores, it was the only way to get any longevity from the game. Played alone, *Galaxian 3* was a short-lived fizzle of a game with no replay value whatsoever.

There was more mindless blasting to be had, albeit in a saucy absurd sort of way, with the coin-op release of Konami's *Sexy Parodius* – the fourth game in the *Parodius* series, which itself was a parody of Konami's own *Gradius* franchise.

Sexy Parodius saw end-of-level bosses that were mainly pretty woman dressed in risqué apparel and level design chock full of innuendo. *Sexy Parodius* was colourful, graphically beautiful and featured some lovely audio. However, the game was more of the same well-worn formula from previous instalments in the series. Not innovative or original but still very playable. PlayStation and Sega Saturn owners got their own excellent conversions of the game later in the year.

MARCH WORLD NEWS

8 March saw the release of the excellent *Fargo*, the latest cinematic offering from the Coen brothers. The acclaimed film went on to scoop two Oscars, Best Original Screenplay and Best Actress for Frances McDormand's moving portrayal of Marge Gunderson.

9 March marked the sad death of cigar-chomping American actor, writer and comedian George Burns, who died a few weeks after reaching the age of 100.

13 March was the date of the tragic Dunblane massacre. Unemployed Thomas Hamilton walked into Dunblane Primary School with several shotguns, shot and killed 16 primary schoolchildren and their teacher and, after further shooting, committed suicide with one of his handguns.

16 March saw British boxing legend and computer game tie-in Frank Bruno lose his last professional fight. He was beaten in three rounds by Mike Tyson, losing the WBC heavyweight title in the process, which he had held for six months after defeating Oliver McCall at Wembley Stadium.

19 March marked the divorce of Nelson and Winnie Mandela, who had been



married for 38 years. There was better wedding news on 31 March when Clint Eastwood married news anchor Dina Ruiz, 35 years younger than the actor. That certainly made his day…

26 March saw the death of David Packard, one of the founders of Hewlett-Packard, a company he started in his garage with an outlay of $538 in 1939 along with partner William Hewlett. The story goes that they couldn't decide whether the company should be called Hewlett-Packard or Packard-Hewlett, so they tossed a coin to settle the dilemma.

THIS MONTH IN…

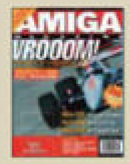
SUPER PLAY



Super Play highlighted an exhibition of retro gaming planned to open on London's South Bank at Christmas. *Super Play* delightfully put down retro gamers by calling them deluded types and games bores. Well, we don't see SNES magazines around much these days, but retro gaming keeps growing…



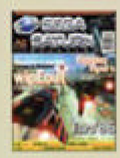
CU AMIGA MAGAZINE



Arriving belatedly to the Amiga beat-'em-up party was *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* by Gametek. *CU Amiga* rated it highly at 83%, which was strange because while the graphics looked suitably lovely, the slow-motion jerky movement of the characters rendered it virtually unplayable.



OFFICIAL SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE



With beat-'em-ups aplenty this month and most not living up to the hype, one slipped under everyone's radar and was an absolute stunner. *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* was frenetic and suffered no slowdown despite big sprites and huge explosions. And you got to play a superhero.



retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



Flashback

A FLASHBACK OF FLASHBACK

#62

» DELPHINE SOFTWARE
» AMIGA
» 1992

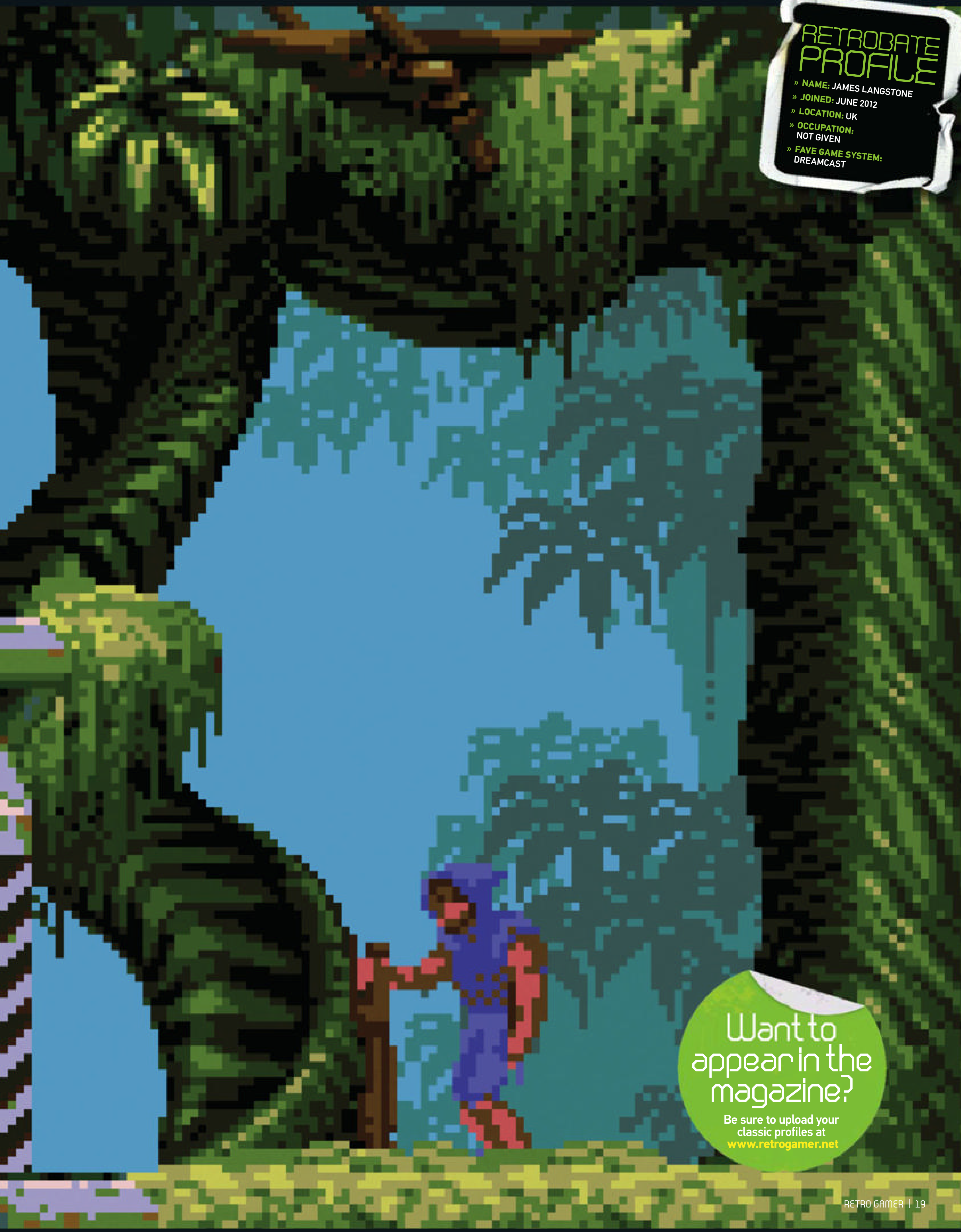
Often mistaken as a follow-up to the just as stellar *Another World*, *Flashback* was one of the finest examples of why the Amiga was a true game's dream.

While, yes, it was released on multiple platforms over its lifetime, the console versions always lacked something – be it reduced sound quality, less crisp visuals or a reworked intro theme which still sits as one of the greatest sins of our time!

For whatever reason, gamers, like myself, who owned an Amiga, were spoilt with one of the best games to be released. The things that made *Flashback* so great were the way it looked, sounded and played. It may not have been the first game to used the stunning rotoscope animation, or have fully hand-drawn and animated backgrounds. But it was one of the few to do it so well, and for anyone who has not played it, the best example I can give is that it was the *Uncharted* of its time. Coupled with the use of great-looking cut-scenes and the whole 'lost identity through amnesia' story plot before it became stale, *Flashback* had the whole package.

The sequel did not do so well, using full 3D visuals at a time when the tech still was young. It made the game a whole lot slower and just felt really clumsy in comparison to its predecessor – which had you running and jumping for your life at one point in a tower that was rigged to explode. Most gamers will never forget that feeling of dread when they messed up, or sheer accomplishment when they finally got all the timing right.

Gushing aside, *Flashback* holds a special place in my childhood, as it was the first game to truly make me sit back and go wow. It was also the best excuse I had to show all my friends up when they played it on their 'superior' gaming systems.



RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** JAMES LANGSTONE
» **JOINED:** JUNE 2012
» **LOCATION:** UK
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** DREAMCAST

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1982-2013

CELEBRATING ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS OF ALL TIME



Ron Gilbert remembers a legacy

Disney closed down LucasArts in April 2013, leaving behind cancelled projects and a rich legacy of games that may never surface again. Although it had been more recently linked to numerous *Star Wars games,* Ron Gilbert remembers a different time. A better time.

"To a lot of people who love *Maniac Mansion*, *Grim Fandango*, *Sam & Max* or *Monkey Island*, it is LucasArts, but for me it will always be Lucasfilm Games. I was sad to learn that it is gone forever.

"I haven't worked there since 1992, but it was still home to me and I considered it my family. I learned just about everything I know about designing games there. I made lifelong friends there. Some of the most memorable and influential years of my life were spent there. I would not be who I am today without Lucasfilm Games."

Ron first joined Lucasfilm Games in 1984, after being hired to port Noah Falstein's *Koronis Rift* from the Atari 800 to the Commodore 64. "I vividly remember interviewing in an office with Noah Falstein and Aric Wilmunder as I explained how you wrote pixels to the screen on a Commodore 64 with its screwed up memory mapping," he continues. "They seemed impressed. Or confused. Either way as long as I got the job."

Ron found himself surrounded by some of the greatest young minds in the industry, ranging from Gary Winnick and David Fox to Doug Crockford and Chip Morningstar. Describing his first week as "mind-blowing", he quickly realised just how much he could learn from his new peers and even managed to rub shoulders with George Lucas himself.

"Soon after arriving, I got a chance to meet George Lucas and I was disappointed," he reveals. "This was around the time of the ten year anniversary of *Star Wars* and he and Steven Spielberg had shaved their beards to sneak into the movie. I wanted to meet the iconic George Lucas with a beard. I wanted to meet the George Lucas who was the hero of my childhood. I pretended the second time I met him was the first."

Ron soon found himself doing what he loved: creating games. After numerous ports, Ron was finally allowed to co-develop his own game, which he worked on with Gary Winnick. The end result was *Maniac Mansion*, a calling card that delivered the rich humour that Ron would become known for, alongside an innovative scripting language called SCUMM. It heralded a new era for both Lucasfilm and adventure games in general.

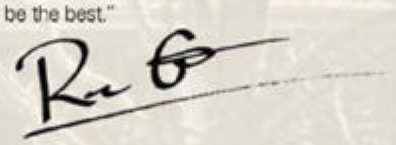
"People often ask me what made Lucasfilm Games so special and unique during those early days," continues Ron. "To me it comes down to two things. The first was that is was Lucasfilm at the height of its popularity… and the second was we couldn't make *Star Wars* games."

It seems absurd nowadays, but before Lucasfilm had moved into games it had given its lucrative *Star Wars* licence to Atari, meaning it was unable to create its own games based on one of the biggest hits in cinematic history. Despite this seemingly huge oversight, Ron actually sees it now as a blessing, saying: "Not being able to make [*Star Wars* games] freed us, freed us in ways that I don't think we understood at the time. Without that freedom, there would be no *Maniac Mansion* or *Monkey Island*. We always felt we had to be making games that were different and pushed the creative edges. We felt we had to live up to the Lucasfilm name."

And live up to the Lucasfilm name they did. For an exceedingly long period, seeing the Lucasfilm games (and later LucasArts) logo or Steve Purcell's energetic art on a game box meant quality, and magazines were soon fighting over themselves to ensure that it was the likes of *Monkey Island 2* or *Grim Fandango* that were adorning their covers and not the generic games that so many other developers were delivering. Of course, the dream didn't last forever, and as interest in point-and-click adventures waned, the team (which Ron had long since left) began to focus more and more on *Star Wars* games.

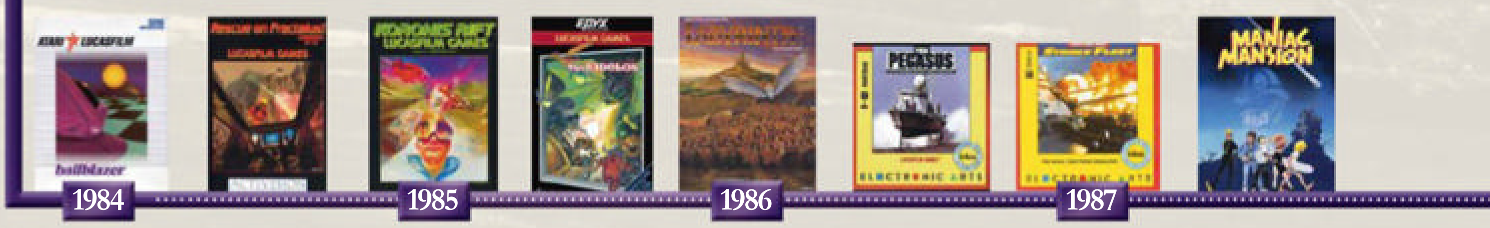
"Maybe Lucasfilm Games was just a perfect storm," Ron surmises. "The right people in the right place at the right time. Whatever it was, I am proud, honoured and humbled to have been a part of it.

"Will a company like Lucasfilm Games ever exist again? If it does, it will take an eccentric billionaire with a vision to let people be free and dream and play and stay small and be the best."



Read Ron's full thoughts on LucasArts in issue 135 of games™ and his personal blog at grumpygamer.com/4103820

The timeline EVERY PUBLISHED AND DEVELOPED GAME



Life At LucasArts

We'd love to have worked at LucasArts during its glory years. We say this because every developer we have ever interviewed since the magazine's inception has constantly told us about the creativity that was allowed to flourish there – particularly when it was Lucasfilm Games – and the sheer amount of experience they took away from working within the well-respected studio. George Lucas created a safe haven where creative types could let their minds run wild when he built Lucasfilm Games, and the end result was some of the most defining releases of all time. Here, developers share some of their fondest memories about Skywalker Ranch and the studio itself.



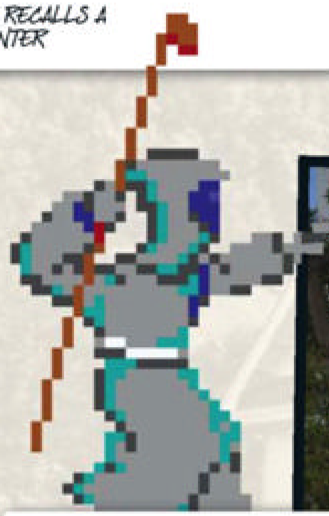
"Lucasfilm Games was in a building called the Stable House. All the buildings at the Ranch were designed to look like places people lived, not worked. We had giant fireplaces outside our offices. I was working one weekend and came out of my office into the common area and found a big falcon with razor-sharp talons perched on the couch. I called security and went back into my office."

RON GILBERT RECALLS A CLOSE ENCOUNTER



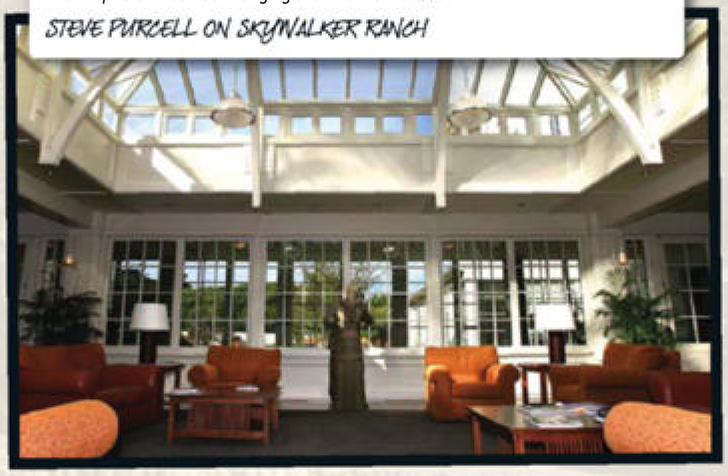
"The majority of people who worked there were in their twenties and single. Everyone's lives rotated around work. We worked and played together. And the level of creativity in everyone from the project leaders to the programmers to the artists to the testers was extraordinarily high. We were all committed to making great games. Lots of late nights."

COLLETTE MICHAUD ON WORKING AT SKYWALKER RANCH



"I remember Huey Lewis watching us play softball. Hiking up to the observatory after lunch. Late screenings at the Stag Theater and walking back to the Stable House in pitch blackness with a billion stars overhead. Driving in on winter mornings and sitting in front of a big fireplace in the Stable House with the original poster art from *The Empire Strikes Back* hanging over the mantle."

STEVE PURCELL ON SKYWALKER RANCH

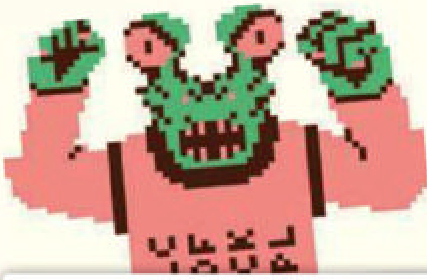




"Steve Purcell owned the coolest object in the building, which was an enormous bullwhip he'd had made for research when he was animating Indiana Jones. Steve knew how to use it, but he would frequently let novices give it a whirl, and that was when you wanted to stand very far away."

DAVE GROSSMAN ON WHO HAD THE BEST TOYS









"When I first stared working there, I was able to go to a storage room where there were dozens of original Ralph McQuarrie concept paintings from all the previous *Star Wars* films. We each got to pick a few for our offices. I kept mine with me as we moved from building to building over the years, and I always loved looking at them for inspiration."

DAVID FOX ON DECORATING HIS OFFICE

"I remember showing *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* to Steven Spielberg, as George Lucas chipped in. Running brainstorming sessions with the two of them on the initial (unpublished) version of *The Dig*, in that same conference room in the Main House. Spielberg keeping ILM waiting (they were showing him some work on *Jurassic Park* dinosaur models) until he'd had a chance to try out our latest flight simulator."

NOAH FALSTEIN MEETS STEVEN SPIELBERG





"Once we got a message that David Lynch had just finished editing the sound for *Wild at Heart* at Skywalker Sound, and would anybody like to come check it out? So we ran across the Ranch and sat in the beautiful art deco Stag Theater and watched David Lynch introduce his brand new movie that no one had seen before. And that first scene where Nicolas Cage smashes open that guy's head, it sounded amazing."

TIM SCHAFER ON COOL PERKS OF THE JOB

"There were about 40 people total, only eight of us in the art department, and lots of games in development. I loved having the chance to work with so many talented, enthusiastic people. We spent a lot of long hours at the office, not because we were crunching on deadlines so much as we just wanted to hang out with everyone and work on cool stuff. It felt like going to grad school, only we were getting paid to be there."

LARRY AHERN ON HIS EARLY DAYS AT LUCASFILM GAMES



"Lunch at the Ranch was fantastic! The nearest restaurant was pretty far away, so the Ranch had its own, with a world-class chef. The food was subsidised, so it was about five bucks for as much grub as you wanted. I frequently took extra and ate it for dinner. Of course, that meant I was working through dinner. But the Ranch was much nicer than my apartment, so I only went home when I ran out of clothes anyway."

DAVE GROSSMAN ON WHY HE NEVER NEEDED TO LEAVE WORK



"After we built *Dark Forces*, I got in touch with John Romero and Tom Hall, who were at id at the time. They came out and I took them to lunch at the Ranch. Those guys were *Star Wars* nuts. It was a lot of fun touring the big house and looking at all the props with them, and then we stopped by the company store and I swear those guys bought every single thing in the store. They had bags and bags and bags. They spent thousands of dollars."

DARON STINNETT RECALLS SHOWING OFF DARK FORCES

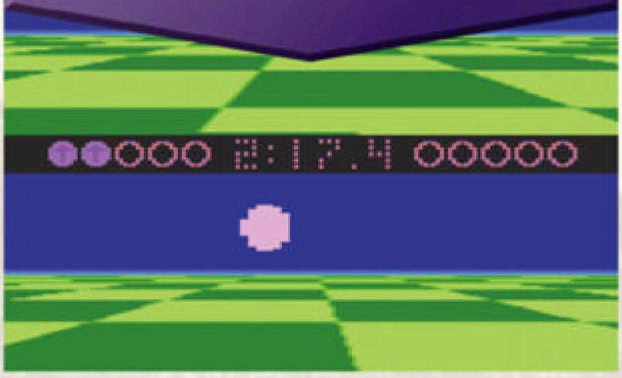


1991 1992 1993



The Best Of LucasArts

LucasArts was behind some of the finest computer games of all time, from hit adventures like *The Secret Of Money Island* to killer action titles like *Star Wars: Dark Forces*. To celebrate the company's greatest moments, we decided to dig through the **Retro Gamer** archives and also unearthed brand new material to deliver a fitting tribute to one of the most innovative developers around. LucasArts may be no more, but it has left a legacy of classics that many publishers would love to have in their portfolios. So join us as we look back at some of its greatest games and speak to the developers behind the magic.



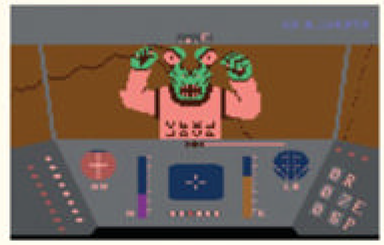
Ballblazer (1984)

The first game from LucasArts (then Lucasfilm Games) surprised most people by having no connection to *Star Wars*. At a glance, *Ballblazer* might have looked like two-piece chess being played a high speed, but its gameplay had more in common with football. Controlling a 'rotofoil' craft inside a chequerboard arena, you competed against computer competitors, or a human opponent, firing a floating sphere between two goal posts. It's a unique sports title and a solid debut.

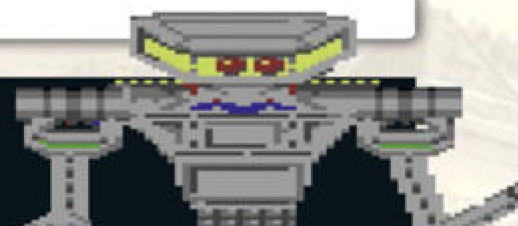
> "We basically had free rein [at Lucasfilm Games] – our mission was simply to make landmark entries into the field. So *Ballblazer* was an experiment to see what [the Atari 800] could do. I had a vision of the game in my mind that I wanted to execute, and fully maximise the capacity of the machine in order to realise it. What was important to me was to establish a simulation and a virtual world that connected two live players together… two being the limitation of the machine at that time. Everything about *Ballblazer* – the grid, the ships, the perspective – was designed to be something that was completely self-consistent and rich to the point that the idiosyncratic, unique physics of the environment would emerge… I wanted players to feel this world…"
>
> DAVID LEVINE ON HIS DESIGN GOALS FOR BALLBLAZER

Rescue On Fractalus! (1984)

Though LucasArts' granting of the home and arcade licence away to Parker Brothers and Atari negated the need for it to produce in-house *Star Wars* games in its early days, this didn't stop the studio from creating games with elements of *Star Wars* in them. *Rescue On Fractalus!* saw you exploring the harsh, mountainous environment of Fractalus to rescue downed pilots, who looked like *Star Wars* Rebel pilots, while facing off against a deadly alien race known as the Jaggi. Inspired by the ILM fractal technology used in the movie *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, *Rescue On Fractalus!* is an impressive game that could almost be described as an unofficial LucasArts *Star Wars* game – something that sounds absolutely bizarre but holds a modicum of truth.



> "We convinced Atari not to tell anyone that the alien was in the game. It didn't appear in their press material, and was hinted at in the manual. During the first few levels of gameplay, the monster never showed up. So, by the time it happened for the first time, players were generally pretty complacent about playing the game. I still get emails from people recalling their first experience with the Jaggi monster. Many people remember the game just because of this, and that it was the only game that ever truly scared them."
>
> DAVID FOX ON THE JAGGI ALIEN

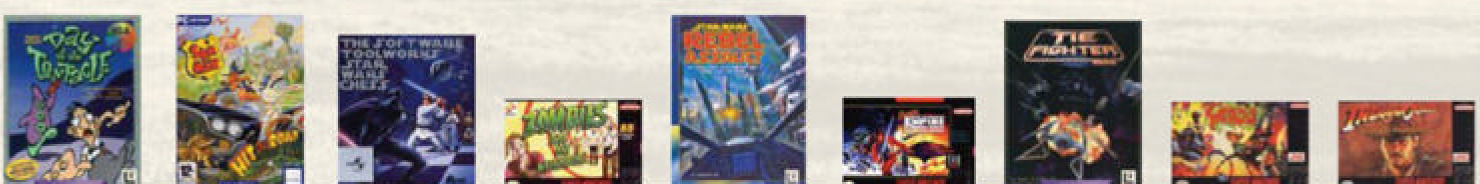


Koronis Rift (1985)

Using the same fractal technology as *Rescue On Fractalus!* and keeping the space theme, *Koronis Rift* could be seen as a sequel. Manning a surface rover on the hostile alien planet of Koronis, your goal was to salvage technology from downed alien tank hulks while surviving attack from flying saucers. The loot could then be analysed by a droid to determine if anything was saleable or could be used to enhance your rover – improving your chances of survival come your next mission. Wonderful atmosphere, a unique premise and great visuals assemble to create another impressive early release from the studio.



> "After *Ballblazer* and *Rescue*, we decided to tackle two new games utilising Loren's fractal engine from *Rescue*. Noah came up with the concept of driving around on an alien world recovering technology from abandoned alien tank hulks, *Koronis Rift*. One of the things I really recall was how much fun I had coming up with all manner of alien races and their associated 'tank-like' vehicles. I probably got to draw 20-30 elaborate colour sketches (all on paper in those days). Then, given the colour palette and resolution of the Atari 800, had to figure out how to reduce them to a common denominator on the computer. We didn't have scanners or tablets, I drew with a joystick (moving a pixel at a time, plotted them onto the screen by pressing the fire button). It was great challenging fun!"
>
> GARY WINNICK ON CREATING THE VEHICLES



1993

1994



Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders (1988)

Seen as something of a spiritual sequel to *Maniac Mansion* by many adventure fans, *Zak McKracken* is a cinematic adventure where players could again switch control between a team of heroes. Here, however, the adventure escapes the confines of a creepy mansion and gets to go jet-setting around the globe… and beyond. The result is a sizeable and epic adventure – telling the story of a tabloid journalist saving the world from mind-meddling aliens – that while not as tightly designed as *Maniac*, is still very enjoyable.

> "I wanted to open it up… make the game take place on a global… er, multi-global scale. I think one of the reasons Ron had *Maniac Mansion* take place in a single location was to get away from artificial constraints of 'you can't go there' showing up all the time. So if it was self-contained in a single building then that made a lot of sense."
>
> DAVID FOX ON THE SCALE OF ZAK MCKRACKEN

Labyrinth (1986)

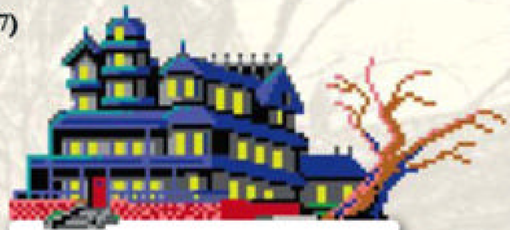
Though *Maniac Mansion* was the first LucasArts game to utilise the SCUMM engine, *Labyrinth* was the studio's first adventure game, and the first to be based on a Lucasfilm movie: the 1986 cult classic starring Jennifer Connelly and David Bowie. The game told a whole new maze-solving adventure featuring cameos from memorable characters from the movie and putting the player in the lead role.



> "I was the lead designer on *Labyrinth*, and ended up sharing a bunch of stuff with Charlie Kellner who was the technical lead. It was the first game we did that was based on a licence, a Lucasfilm production movie, which meant it wasn't going to be original, from-scratch content. We got to go to London and spent an amazing week brainstorming with Douglas Adams and Chris Cerf from Children's Television Workshop – a close friend of Jim Henson, who directed the film. One of Douglas's ideas was a nod to *The Wizard of Oz*, where the movie opens in black and white and moves to Technicolor when Dorothy gets to Oz. So we started off with a text adventure, the gaming equivalent of black and white, with a sort of slot-machine mechanic where you picked nouns and adjectives from a menu. When you won the text adventure segment you entered a movie theatre where the graphic portion of the game began… you saw David Bowie on the screen and he said 'Come on in.' You were now part of his universe on the other side of the movie screen."
>
> DAVID FOX ON THE OPENING OF LABYRINTH

Maniac Mansion (1987)

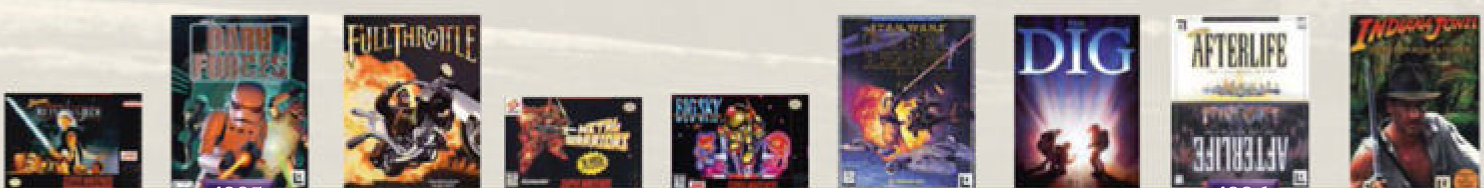
The release that kicked off the golden age of adventure games at LucasArts, *Maniac Mansion* was the first title to utilise its pivotal SCUMM engine (SCUMM stands for 'Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion'), which took a lot of the guesswork out of adventure game control. With a story that captured the feel of corny horror films of the time, amusing puzzles, memorable cast of characters, team-based gameplay, and a script laced with edgy humour, *Maniac Mansion* proved that videogames could capture the feel and polished narrative of films, and laid down the template that a great many other classic adventures from LucasArts would follow.







> "We had very little oversight, which is one of the things I credit Lucasfilm for coming out with so many classic games back then. We did what was fun and funny. One thing we had to cut that I clearly remember was one of the opening lines. Dave says 'Don't be a tuna head.' This was originally 'Don't be a shit head', but we were told to change it. We argued with the head of the Lucasfilm Games Division and I'm sure we talked about our 'artistic vision' and other stuff. In the end our boss told Gary and I to go away and think about why we wanted to swear. If we came back with a good reason, we could keep it. But we couldn't. It really taught me an important lesson about writing and how and why you choose the words you do. It's one of the main reasons you won't see swearing in a game I do."
>
> RON GILBERT ON CUTS MADE TO MANIAC MANSION



1995

1996

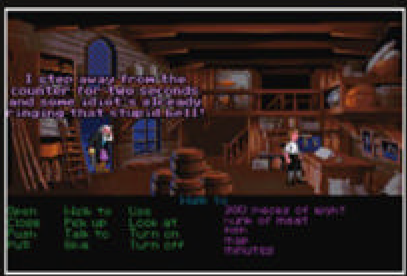


> I started thinking about *Monkey Island* during *Last Crusade* – I loved the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, and I always wanted to make a game that existed in that world. For me that was the starting point of *Monkey Island* – that weird Caribbean-type environment with all these fun-loving pirates (and lots of horrible pirates).
>
> RON GILBERT ON THE INSPIRATION FOR MONKEY ISLAND

> Also a lot of humour was visual, such as with Stan the used ship salesman and his flailing arms and all that stuff. That's the difference with working in such a creative environment: Ron's got his style and Dave had his, and the games we made together were different from the games we would have made separately; each of us brought a different kind of flavour to it.
>
> TIM SCHAFER ON THE GAME'S HUMOUR

The Secret Of Monkey Island (1990)

In many ways Guybrush Threepwood is to LucasArts what Luke Skywalker is to Lucasfilm. He is an instantly recognisable hero who has become symbolic of the studio that created him. *Monkey Island* saw Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafer and David Grossman unite with spectacular results, creating what is unarguably LucasArts' most iconic game franchise. One of Gilbert's main design goals when creating *Monkey Island* was to prevent players from getting stuck through lazy game design, which was a personal bugbear from adventure games that he'd played in the past. Using the SCUMM engine to achieve this aim, this would allow players to simply get on with solving puzzles and enjoying the adventure. *Monkey Island* became a big success, both critically and commercially, and spawned a series of five graphical adventure games. Gilbert, Schafer and Grossman would collaborate again for the first and highly anticipated sequel *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*, which went a step further to make itself accessible for beginners by incorporating a 'lite' mode. The third game in the franchise, *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, became notable for being the last game to use the SCUMM engine.

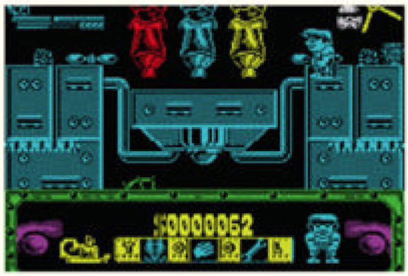


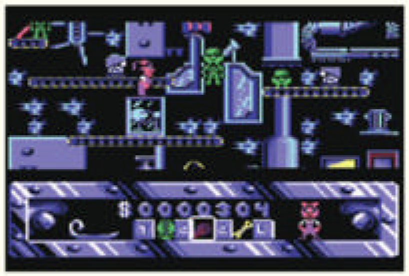


> I tried to join as many brainstorming/design sessions as I could when Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman were working – I contributed the core idea for Insult Swordfighting to *Monkey Island*, and was the producer for a few months on *Day Of The Tentacle*. Those were the funniest sessions to be in on.
>
> NOAH FALSTEIN ON HIS CONTRIBUTION TO MONKEY ISLAND









Night Shift (1990)

Something that George Lucas has never been against in the past is a bit of lucrative *Star Wars* merchandising. In fact, if there's an object on this Earth that hasn't had Darth Vader's head plastered over it, we've yet to see it. With that in mind, *Night Shift*, a platformer which evolved into a game about players managing production of a machine that manufactures *Star Wars* action figures, is probably the most satirical game in the studio's back catalogue.

> It all started from a graphical perspective, rather than a game mechanic perspective. I was doodling drawings of pistons, conveyors and sprockets. I'd always loved Meccano and mad professors inventing machines with loads of gadgets and moving parts. As I drew, the machine grew and grew on the page, and I imagined a flow of parts moving around the machine in different stages of construction. It then hit me that it would be really fun to actually run around the machine, treating it like an animated platformer, where the goal was to make the machine work properly – and from that I doodled a drawing of Fred Fixit in overalls with a big wrench and the idea was born.
>
> CHRIS GIBBS ON HIS INSPIRATIONS FOR NIGHT SHIFT

Loom (1990)

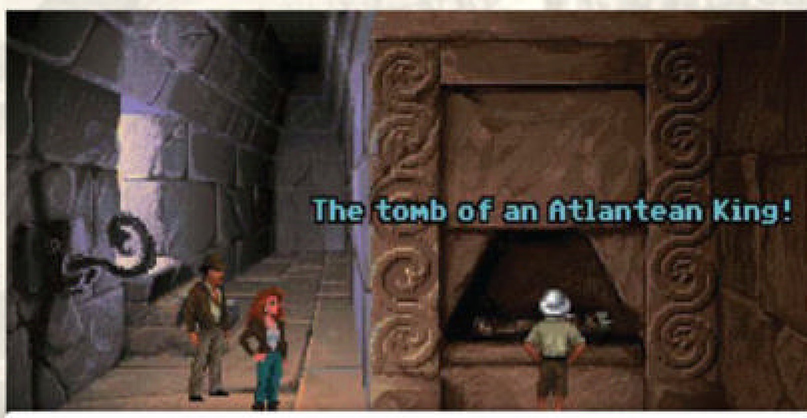
Arguably LucasArts' most unique SCUMM game, *Loom* was a fantasy adventure that dropped the time-honoured method of object manipulation and movement to solve puzzles for spell-casting. Controlling the exiled weaver Bobbin Threadbare, you progressed through this stunning-looking fantasy adventure through learning different spells played on a magical instrument called the distaff. As the story advanced, more notes could be learnt which, in turn, allowed more spells to be unlocked. *Loom* was designed by Brian Moriarty, who joined the studio after the closure of Infocom. There he worked on the games *Wishbringer* and *Trinity*.

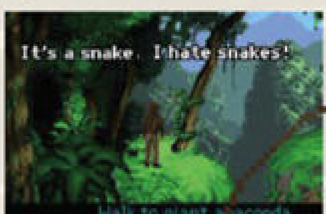


> When the project started, I spent quite a bit of time with lead animator Gary Winnick and background artist Mark Ferrari, discussing possible styles. I think it was Gary who first suggested that we take a look at Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* – [it] has a very striking look, unlike any other Disney feature. Walt reportedly wanted it to look like a moving tapestry. It was designed by the artist Eyvind Earle, with abstract shapes and flat planes of colour. Mark adapted the look to the limited 16-colour EGA palette with amazing results.
>
> BRIAN MORIARTY ON LOOM

Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis (1992)

The Fate Of Atlantis marked the second Indy SCUMM adventure, but the first to be based on a standalone storyline. This was what really set *Fate Of Atlantis* apart from previous Indiana videogames. For fans it was seen as a great new adventure that offered something on a par to Indy's classic non-interactive escapades. As its title implies, the adventure saw Indy on the search for the mysterious city of Atlantis. It was notable for allowing players to tackle the story in three different gameplay 'paths' (Fighting, Team and Wits), and praised for its story, scripting and how well it captured the tone and feel of the blockbuster movies.







> I'm an old friend George Lucas. We went to film school together and he knew of my interest in games way back in the early Eighties, when Lucasfilm Games was forming. He introduced me to Steve Arnold, who ran the Games Group for several years, and I started to hang around the company. I met David Fox, Ron Gilbert and Noah Falstein during that period. These guys worked hard as a triumvirate to produce the first Lucasfilm licensed property ever, *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* – a wonderful game based on the last Jones movie, and a sizeable hit.
>
> HAL BARWOOD ON HOW HE CAME TO WORK ON THE HIT ADVENTURE INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS



1999





Day Of The Tentacle (1993)

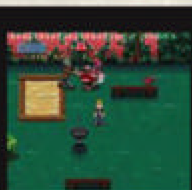
The sequel to *Manic Mansion* took a few years to finally arrive, but for fans it was certainly worth waiting for. *Tentacle* captured all the humour, character and clever puzzles that made its predecessor so popular and applied them to a clever time-travelling story. As a result, events in the game took place in the same one location, but the story occurred across three different time periods. Objects even became cleverly affected by the ravages of time, and its story allowed for some amusing cameos from historic figures like Benjamin Franklin and George Washington.

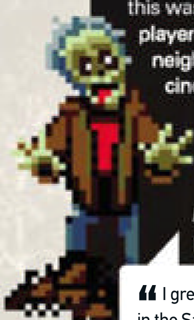


> “In order to maintain our own sanity during production, we decided that we had better limit it to Bernard, Hoagie and Laverne, rather than allowing you to pick from a set. Lots more stuff was hand-animated than had been in *Maniac*, and the permutations of animating all those actions for all six characters would have killed us. Razor was the same hard-edged girl from *Maniac Mansion*, albeit with more pixels, colours and style. Chester looked like Ned and Jed Edison, except he was black, with beat-poet facial hair and a cup of espresso permanently attached to his hand. Moonglow was shortish, with sandals, baggy clothes and a cascade of frizzy curly hair. I was looking forward to writing dialogue for these people.”
>
> DAVE GROSSMAN ON DAY OF THE TENTACLE'S HEROES



Zombies Ate My Neighbors (1993)





A rare LucasArts release for consoles, this was an overhead shooter that saw players battling to rescue survivors in a monster-ravaged neighbourhood. Zombie enemies paid homage to classic cinema monsters including Dracula and Wolfman, and it had the look and feel of cult kids-versus-monsters comedy horror films like *Monster Squad* and *The Lost Boys*. Popular with gamers and critics, *Zombies* even spawned a sequel, *Ghoul Patrol*, which actually started life as a detached project before it got folded into the series.

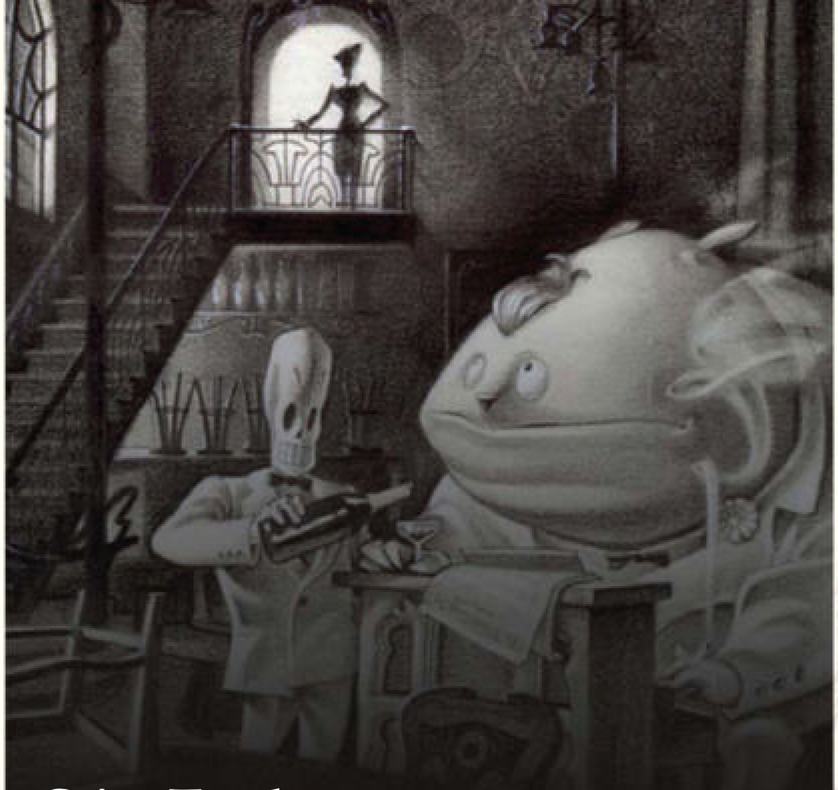
> “I grew up watching 'creature features' at a local Saturday night show in the San Francisco area that always played the worst monster movies, so I was very familiar with the genre. Plus pop-culture references are so fun in games. LucasArts had a very good legal team that let us know exactly how far we could push the parody. That legal support really was important to let us go all out and poke fun at everything.”
>
> MIKE EBERT ON THE MANY POP CULTURE REFERENCES IN ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS

Sam & Max Hit The Road (1993)

Arguably adventure gaming's greatest ever double act, freelance police officers Sam and Max initially found popularity through a comic-book series created by Steve Purcell. However, the pair found wider success after they broke into videogames with *Sam & Max Hit The Road*. The move came as a result of Purcell becoming employed by LucasArts in the late Eighties and his creations appearing in internal SCUMM training materials used to put new programmers through their paces. The series has since gained a cult status and spawned several episodic sequels under Telltale Games – a studio formed by former LucasArts designers who were working on the canned LucasArts' *Hit The Road* sequel *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*.

> “I think the game is really close to the spirit of the comics. There's violence, mild cursing and a commendable lack of respect for authority, not to mention circus freaks and yetis. There's less gunplay in the game simply because a gun is a terrible object to give someone to use in an adventure game unless you carefully guide the player to use it in a more interesting way. I don't remember anything getting cut by management. Much to their credit, I think they trusted our judgement.”
>
> STEVE PURCELL ON THE GAME'S CLOSENESS TO THE COMICS





Star Wars: Dark Forces (1995)

Dark Forces was the first first-person shooter to be set in the *Star Wars* universe. Praised at the time for its cutting-edge visuals and rich storyline, it followed the adventures of Kyle Katarn, a brand new protagonist, who was chosen by the team in favour of Luke Skywalker. *Dark Forces* is notable for delivering a number of firsts to the genre – ranging from the ability to jump to being able to look up and down – and it was filled with classic characters and weapons, perfectly capturing George Lucas' memorable universe in digital form.

> “We did consider having the player play as Luke Skywalker… [but] we needed to take this character wherever we needed to take them to make the game fun. While Luke Skywalker in *Episode IV* made for an entertaining experience to watch, and there were certainly things and scenes that Luke did that would have made fun gameplay experiences, it wasn't ultimately going to fulfil the needs of an entire game.”
>
> DARON STINNETT ON WHY LUKE DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT

Full Throttle (1995)

As Ben, the leader of a biker gang known as the Polecats, you had to fight to clear their names after they found themselves framed for murder. Wonderfully penned by Tim Schafer, *Full Throttle* marked a gear change from previous LucasArts adventures. This SCUMM adventure game used a cursor-controlled menu and dialogue system, and the puzzles were punctuated by a few action mini-games, including *Road Rash*-style combat sections. *Full Throttle* came in for a bit of criticism for its short length, but no one could argue that it wasn't an entertaining ride while it lasted.



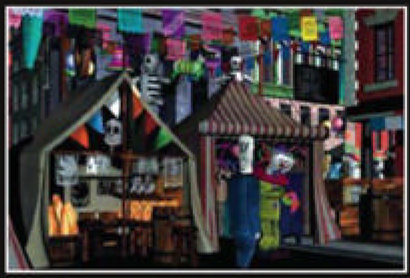
> “We fleshed out the storyline, and tried to take all our awesome action and sci-fi biker ideas and shoehorn them into some kind of puzzle structure that would also forward the narrative. On *Full Throttle*, we looked at comic books, and were going for a very graphic novel look combined with a cinematic style. You can see touches of Mike Mignola in there, along with some anime stuff like *Akira*.”
>
> LARRY AHERN ON THE INSPIRATIONS BEHIND FULL THROTTLE

Grim Fandango (1998)

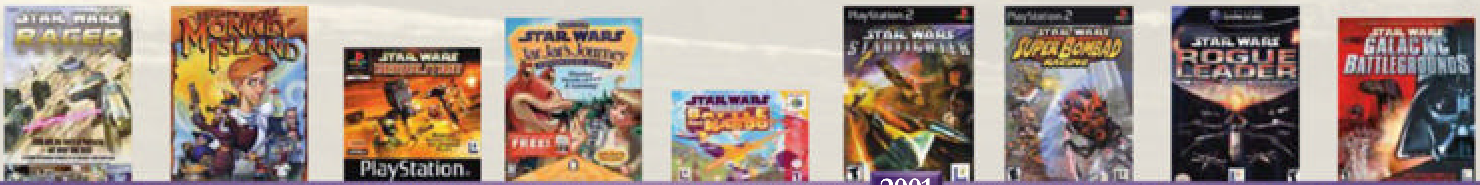
The first LucasArts adventure to make the jump to 3D, *Grim Fandango* was a film noir comedy adventure that used 3D modelled characters set against pre-rendered backgrounds. The star was Manny, a skeletal travel agent who uncovers a devious plot to fiddle the dossiers of wicked dead people so that they can travel to the final stage of the afterlife quicker than do-gooders. *Grim Fandango* presented gamers with a rich and stunning art deco world brimming with imagination, high production values and excellent humour.

> “I was really obsessed with film noir; I was reading a lot of Raymond Chandler; there happened to be a film festival at the Lark Theatre in Marin showing a whole bunch of film noir movies. I went every single night and saw every single one.”
>
> TIM SCHAFER ON HIS OBSESSION WITH FILM NOIR CINEMA









2001



The Art Of Steve Purcell

Sam & Max creator Steve Purcell painted many of LucasArts' iconic boxes, including *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders*, the first two *Monkey Island* games, *Pipe Dream*, and *Mortimer And The Riddles Of The Medallion*. His energetic and sometimes surreal art style perfectly captured the offbeat humour of the games that they were based on, and you could immediately spot Purcell's distinctive style on any store shelf. Steve eventually left LucasArts and moved to Industrial Light & Magic, but it wasn't long before he moved to Pixar, where he has remained ever since. Steve has continued to work on his beloved *Sam & Max* franchise, which is now at Telltale Games, and recently co-directed Pixar's smash hit *Brave*. Here he tells us about the process behind his cover art for LucasArts and reveals further details on some of his favourite pieces.





“I was asked to do a portrait of the Edison family. At first it was going to be a tiny painting to fit in a model hallway, which would be photographed. The designers realised it would be less expensive to build a full-size fake hallway set. They asked for a big painting so I painted it in oils over a weekend, inspired by the haunted mansion portraits at Disneyland.”

MANIAC MANSION

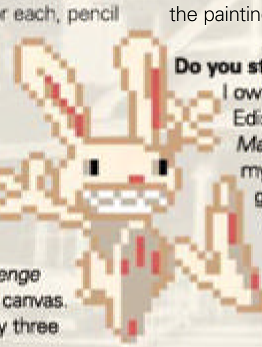
The interview

Who came up with the concepts for game boxes?

The Lucasfilm Games execs fielded the overall branding concepts, but the project leaders definitely had strong ideas about the covers. I remember for the *LeChuck's Revenge* cover Ron Gilbert said he wanted the illustration to look like a cover from a classic book.

Could you describe the process of creating the box covers?

For *Zak McKracken*, I hadn't worked on the game so was guided by Gary Winnick and David Fox as to what the key elements should be. I worked with a design firm as to the proportions and type placement. For both *Monkey Island* covers I was an artist on the games so I knew all the elements. I submitted three sketches for each, pencil sketches for *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and on *LeChuck* I did three little paintings of my ideas. One would be selected and then I would transfer the sketch to the board. The first *Monkey Island* painting was in dyes and gouache (an opaque watercolour). *LeChuck's Revenge* was an oil painting on a linen canvas. I decided to do it big – two by three feet, and I spent a month painting it. The fact that people still care about it makes all the effort worthwhile.





Did you have to make any last-minute changes?

For the first *Monkey Island* I was trying to visualise what Guybrush and Elaine would look like beyond their tiny pixellized form, so I had a version where Guybrush was more of an action hero, which doesn't look at all the way we think of him now. Also, when I did the actual cover I had painted Guybrush's expression more tentative, sort of 'in awe'. It was decided that he should have a more mature, determined expression so I brought the painting home and repainted his face.

Do you still have any of the paintings?

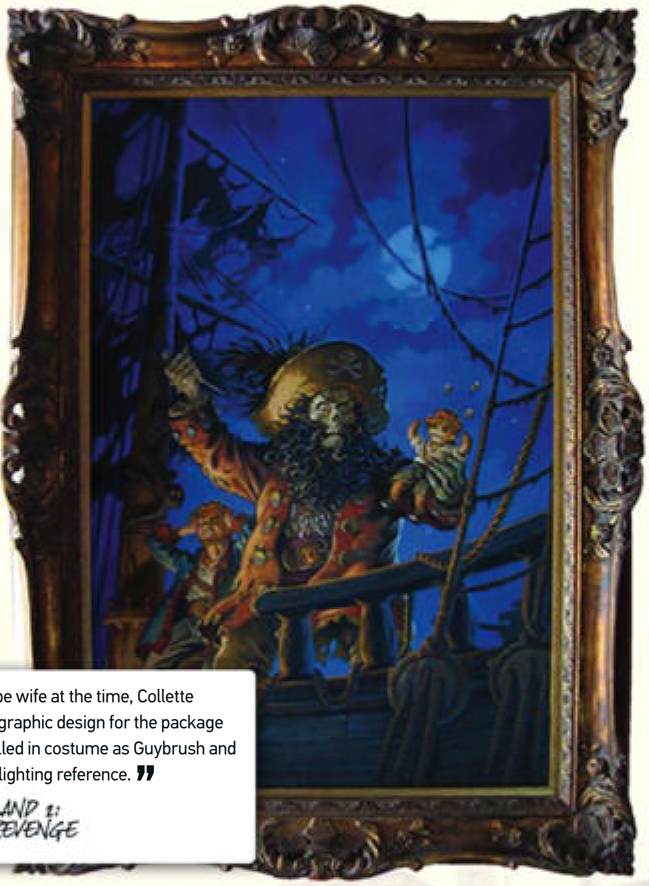
I own *LeChuck's Revenge* and the Edison portrait [from the back of *Maniac Mansion*], which hang in my office. For *LeChuck*, I found a giant gilded frame and I remember thinking 'what do you use this frame for if you don't have a pirate painting?' I still own *Sam & Max* and the *Mortimer* piece, too.



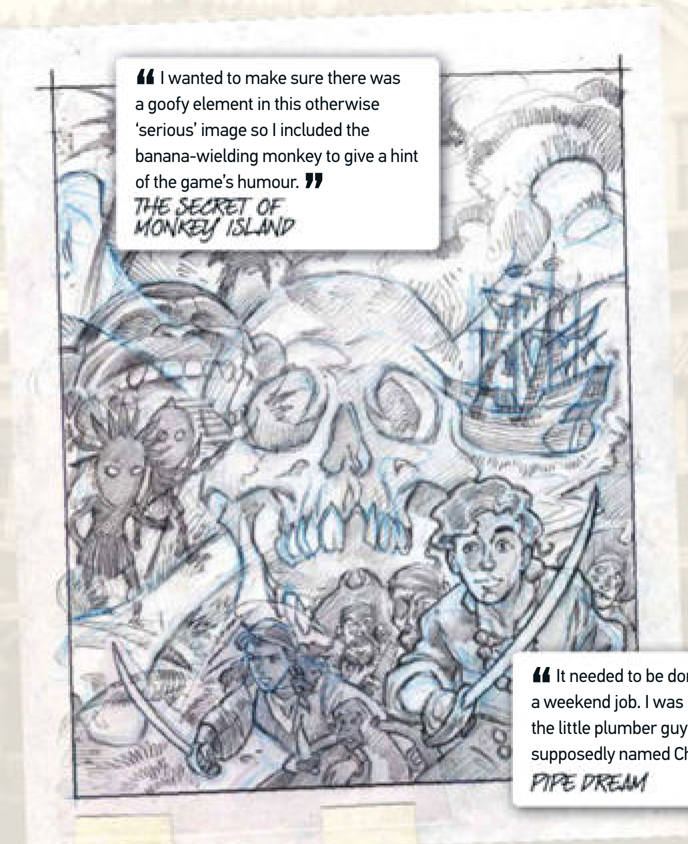
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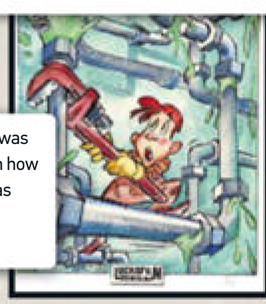
“My soon-to-be wife at the time, Collette Michaud did the graphic design for the package as well as modelled in costume as Guybrush and LeChuck for my lighting reference.”
MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE



“I wanted to make sure there was a goofy element in this otherwise ‘serious’ image so I included the banana-wielding monkey to give a hint of the game's humour.”
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND



“I helped design the characters and offered to paint the cover in oils. For me, oil paints seem to breathe more life into an illustration. I asked Peter Chan to take on the task of illustrating the carved-looking border elements.”
MORTIMER AND THE RIDDLES OF THE MEDALLION



“It needed to be done quickly. I think it was a weekend job. I was mostly pleased with how the little plumber guy turned out, who was supposedly named Chuck.”
PIPE DREAM

Gold Guy highlights

The Gold Guy logo had numerous different animations in recent years. Here are some of our favourites

INDY'S GREATEST ADVENTURES



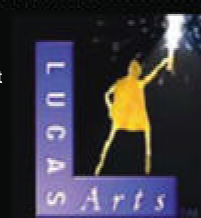
■ Indiana Jones nearly gets crushed by the iconic logo. Annoyed, he pushes the errant logo off screen.

GRIM FANDANGO



■ A little ironic given LucasArts' current situation. The Gold Guy appears as usual, to be replaced by a spooky skeleton version.

GLADIUS



■ The Gold Guy turns the LucasArts eye-burst into the titular sword, before slowly holding it aloft and letting it change back into its familiar form.

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

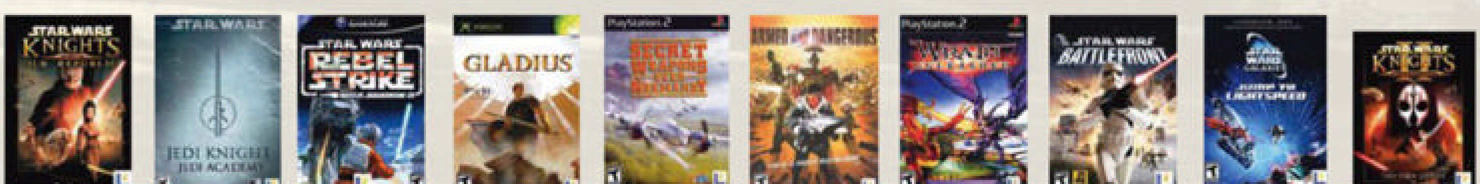


■ A simple but effective offering. The Gold Guy transforms into a confused monkey holding a banana.

STAR WARS: FORCE UNLEASHED



■ The Gold Guy misses getting hit by a thrown lightsaber, then uses the Force to explode into the latest LucasArts logo.

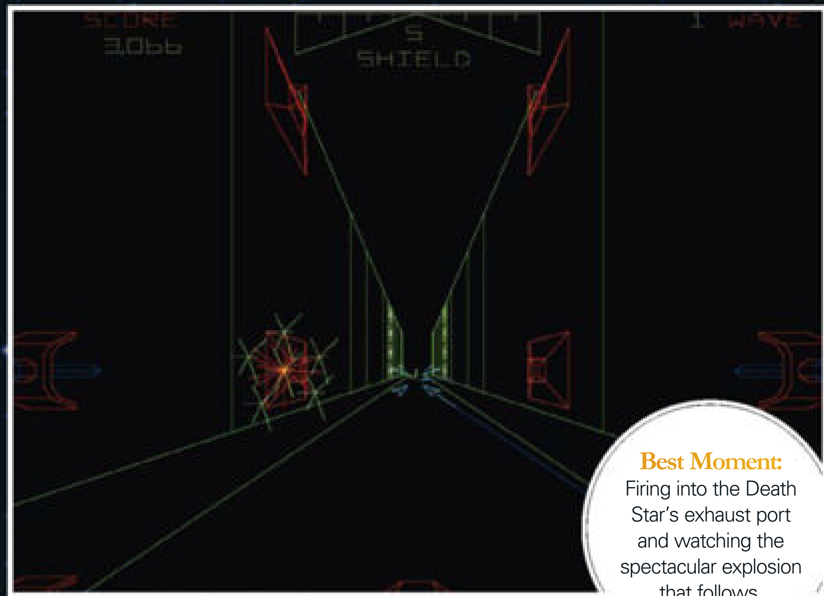


2004



Ten Essential Star Wars Games

When you think of LucasArts you think of classic point-and-click adventures and *Star Wars* games; lots and lots of *Star Wars* games. LucasArts has been licensing out the lucrative franchise for over 30 years and in that time there have been over 100 games, from hit arcade blasters like *Star Wars* to the obscure educational release *Jabba's Game Galaxy*. We've already catalogued the vast majority of these games back in issues 52 and 53, but have decided to showcase our ten personal favourites here. Perhaps the most interesting thing we've discovered is just how few games LucasArts actually created in-house, proving that the company was extremely canny when it came to choosing developers who would get the best out of the rich and fertile universe that George Lucas had created.



Best Moment: Firing into the Death Star's exhaust port and watching the spectacular explosion that follows.

Star Wars (1983)

■ This 1983 arcade smash is arguably one of the most exciting *Star Wars* games ever made, but amazingly, LucasArts only licensed it. Created and published by Atari Inc, it's a fantastic vector graphics-based shooter that recreates the thrilling attack on the Death Star. Famed at the time for its slick visuals, impressive use of speech and fast-paced combat, it remains a fantastically frantic blaster that has you squaring off against increasing hordes of TIE Fighters and flying down the infamous Death Star trench.

My favourite Star Wars game

Readers weigh in with their personal favourites

"TIE Fighter by a country mile, X-Wing was good but Tie Fighter took the series to a new level. I bought a PC to play it" ZXSabreman

"Easily Knights Of The Old Republic. Not only one of the best Star Wars games I've played, but one of the best RPGs. Being able to make decisions that would determine whether your powers would be light or dark was plain awesome. Go Sith" ShadowNeku

"Rogue Squadron on GameCube and The Phantom Menace on PlayStation. I liked the fact you could stroll around chatting to anyone or starting fights" SoupDragon

"Star Wars (Arcade) – the 'daddy' of Star Wars games. As good as many other games are, this was comparable to being in the film (but then again I'd only be about 12 at the time)" stvd



Best Moment: Getting to go one-on-one with Boba Fett, the world's favourite bounty hunter.

Star Wars: Dark Forces (1995)

■ After seeing the success of *Doom*, LucasArts decided it wanted to make its own first-person shooter. The end result was *Dark Forces* and for many people it's actually a better game than id's iconic blaster. *Dark Forces* delivers all the frenetic action of *Doom* and similar games, but marries it to a genuinely epic story that features plenty of cool nods to the original trilogy. Graphically superb, it's also notable for introducing Kyle Katarn, a former imperial officer who later becomes a revered Jedi Knight (as seen in the four sequels that followed).



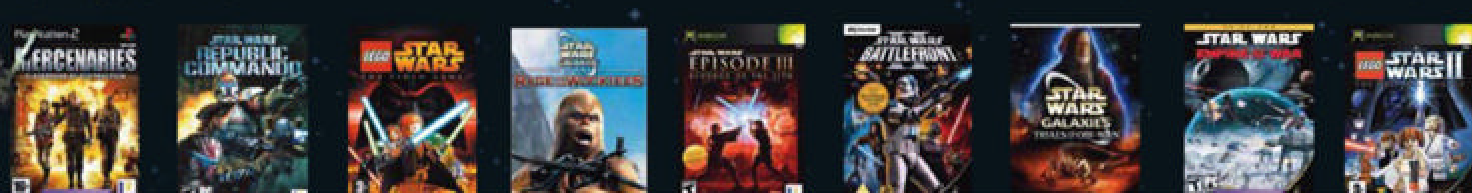
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic (2003)

■ BioWare was the obvious choice to make a sprawling epic RPG set in the *Star Wars* universe and it didn't disappoint. Built around a stealthily hidden D20 system (the same rules that powered *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*) it delivered a gripping story, a large roster of unforgettable characters and a neat moral choice mechanic that would have a key impact on later parts of the game. While some were disappointed that it was set 4,000 years before the films, it allowed BioWare free rein to create its own mythology. One of the best *Star Wars* games of all time.



Best Moment: The moment when BioWare delivers its trademark 'I did not see that coming' twist.

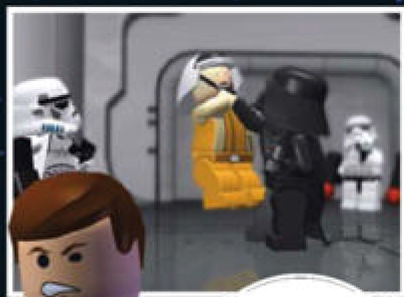




2005

2006

Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy (2006)



■ There have been several *Lego* games based on the *Star Wars* universe, but this is easily the best. Like many other *Lego* games, its key strengths are its excellent multiplayer component, its instant accessibility and the sheer amount of items available to collect. It's a hoarder's dream, but comes attached to one of the best trilogies of all time. Traveller's Tales' take on it is superb as well, cramming in all the important parts of the three classic movies, with plenty of genuinely laugh-out-loud cutscenes.

Best Moment: Marvelling at how Traveller's Tales can find mirth in every aspect of the *Star Wars* universe.

Star Wars: Episode I Racer (1999)

■ The *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* movie may have been a disappointment for fans of the series, but it did spawn this incredible racing game. Taking inspiration from Nintendo's *F-Zero* series, LucasArts scaled back the detail in favour of delivering a sickeningly fast sense of speed. The trade-off works beautifully (particularly on the N64), allowing you to further appreciate the devilishly designed tracks that LucasArts has created. Even today, the handling of the various pods remains superb, while the challenging AI will ensure you constantly return for one more play.

Best Moment: Sitting down in the arcade version and using those controllers for the first time.

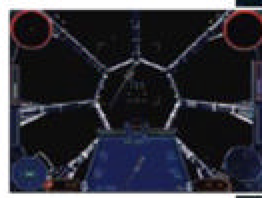


Super Star Wars (1992)



■ While its two sequels added numerous gameplay improvements, the original *Super Star Wars* remains the best. Following the original story (with the odd bit of artistic licence), *Super Star Wars* is a highly enjoyable run-and-gun cum platformer that features impressive visuals (particularly during the Mode 7 sections), tight controls and plenty of classic levels from the hit film to fight through.

Star Wars: TIE Fighter (1994)



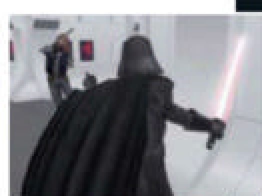
■ *X-Wing* got the ball rolling, while *X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter* delivered the multiplayer shenanigans that every pilot so desperately craved, but *TIE Fighter* remains the best game in the series. Everything about it is perfect, from its cleverly constructed missions to the controls and feel of every available fighter and the thrust of its gripping story. Unmissable.

Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader (2008)



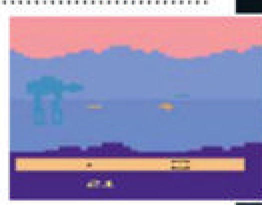
■ Despite it being over a decade old, *Rogue Leader* remains the most realistic-looking *Star Wars* game we've ever played, with scenes looking like they've been directly lifted from the classic films. It also helps that it's a fantastic *Star Wars* game in its own right, easily building on the structure of the original N64 game and adding an epic sense of scale.

Star Wars: Battlefront II (2005)

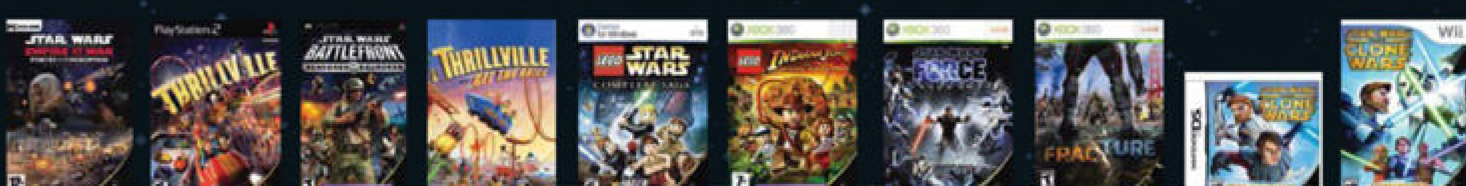


■ When *Battlefront* was first released in 2004, it set a precedent for its epic multiplayer battles and effectively being a *Star Wars* version of *Battlefield*. It was missing something, however: the ability to play as key characters from the *Star Wars* universe. *Star Wars Battlefront II* rectified this by letting you play as Luke, Vader and other figures for brief amounts of time, allowing you to truly feel the Force.

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (1982)



■ Another cracking *Star Wars* game that wasn't developed or published by LucasArts. It's effectively a *Star Wars* take on *Defender* with the player controlling a snowspeeder and fending off hordes of AT-ATs. Later games may have depicted the epic battle of Hoth more realistically, but they weren't as fast-paced.



2007 2008

10 Things You Didn't Know About LucasArts

LucasArts has a fascinating history that dates back an impressive 30 years. We assigned Emily Morganti to quiz past employees of the company to unearth the following interesting facts about the revered software house.



1 Lucasfilm Games' original headquarters, Skywalker Ranch, is located on Lucas Valley Road in Marin County, California. But the street name has nothing to do with George Lucas – it's named after 19th Century rancher John Lucas, no relation to George.

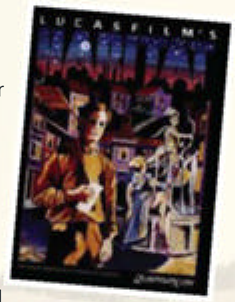


2 *Ballblazer*, one of the studio's first games, sold few copies on its original platform, the Atari 800. In the autumn of 1983, Lucasfilm gave an unprotected beta version to Atari's marketing department with the working title *Ballblaster.* A pirated version was soon posted on online bulletin boards. Though it went on to do well on other platforms, the widespread *Ballblaster* beta is the version most Atari 800 owners played – including future hire Tim Schafer.



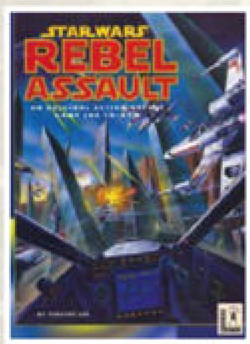
3 In the Eighties and early Nineties, Lucasfilm couldn't make *Star Wars* games due to Atari having an exclusive videogame licence for the hotter than hot property. Ron Gilbert believes the restriction was indirectly responsible for original games like *Maniac Mansion* and *Loom*: "If we had been able to make *Star Wars* games, it's probably all we would have done."

4 LucasArts and Pixar both started out as The Lucasfilm Computer Division, which had a game department (that would later became LucasArts) and a graphics department (that Steve Jobs bought and turned into Pixar). Tim Schafer still owns a sweatshirt with early Pixar characters André and Wally B on the front, and 'The Lucasfilm Computer Division' on the back.



5 Lucasfilm Games created the first-ever graphical MMO, *Habitat*. Released in the US in 1986 as a beta over QuantumLink (an online service for Commodore 64), *Habitat* was a large-scale community akin to *Second Life* that ran on 300 baud modems. Players could customise and control their avatars, interact via text chat, engage in quests, buy and sell goods, get married and divorced, and even kill one another – all in a virtual world that looked a bit like *Maniac Mansion*.

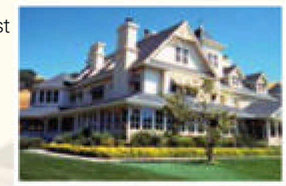
6 George Lucas gave employees complete creative freedom, even on *Star Wars* games. "People wanted to work for LucasArts because they admired George, and that very quickly could have turned into being stifled by George. He could have been very influential in what we were doing," says Daron Stinnett. "But he let us do our thing. He wanted us to go out and create our own stories and adventures."



7 The company came close to shutting down a few times between 1990 and 1993. According to Collette Michaud, *Rebel Assault* almost single-handedly saved the studio: "Gordon Radley, the CEO of Lucasfilm, came to one of our company meetings after *Rebel Assault* launched and said that the 'battleship was turning.' From then on, we always liked to joke [about] this phrase, but we knew we were headed in a positive direction and that the company was going to make it."

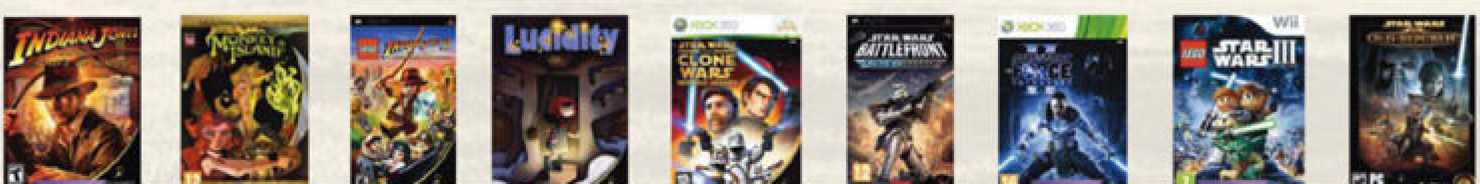
8 Though he went on to become a LucasArts icon, the 'Gold Guy' logo didn't appear until 1991's *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* – the first game to ship under the LucasArts name. The boxy Gold Guy standing on a purple 'L' remained a staple until 2005, when he was revised into a shorter, curvier version.

9 The company known as LucasArts was never located at Skywalker Ranch. In 1990, Lucasfilm Games moved off the Ranch and into offices in nearby San Rafael. Larry Ahern was part of the last wave of employees to work at the Ranch: "I was only there for about a month, training on the art and animation tools, but that was just long enough to earn the right to complain about my loss of country club privileges."



10 Your copy of *The Secret Of Monkey Island* may have been hand-packed by Ron Gilbert himself. "*Monkey Island* was done and out the door to manufacturing. In those days you couldn't just upload your game, you had to have someone make floppy disks and put them in a box," Dave Grossman recalls. "The manufacturing facility didn't have the capacity to meet the initial orders the next day. So a bunch of us from the games division worked the graveyard shift at this warehouse, staying up all night riveting code wheels, packing and shrink-wrapping boxes, and so on. It was the shortest and most awesome crunch ever in the history of games."





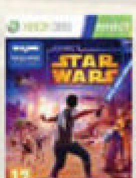


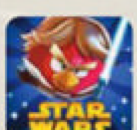
2009 2010 2011

The logos of LucasArts

The changing face of the iconic logo over the last 31 years

- 1982
- 1985
- 1988
- 1989
- 1990
- 1990
- 1991
- 2005 (Cancelled)
- 2005





2012

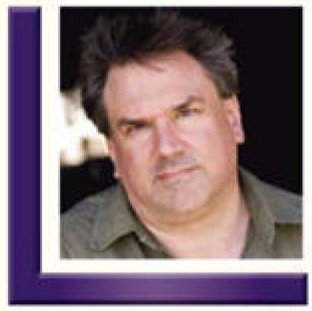
Where are they now?

We highlight some of LucasArts' most prominent staff, revealing their roles within the company and what they're currently up to



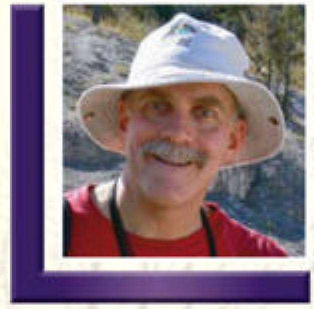
Collette Michaud 1990-1996

ROLE: Artist / animator, game designer
WHERE IS SHE NOW? In 2005 Collette founded a non-profit children's museum about 70km north of Skywalker Ranch, where she still works today.



Ron Gilbert 1985-1992

ROLE: Game designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? Recently finished *The Cave* with Double Fine. About to ship indie iOS game *Scurvy Scallywags In The Voyage To Discover The Ultimate Sea Shanty: A Musical Match-3 Pirate RPG.*



David Fox 1982-1992

ROLE: Game designer, later became director of operations
WHERE IS HE NOW? Working on his first game in 20 years, an official Rube Goldberg game that uses the original art, with LucasArts pal Kalani Streicher.



Steve Purcell 1988-1996

ROLE: Artist / animator, game designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? At Pixar, where he co-wrote/directed *Brave*. He returned to Skywalker to work on the sound mix: "Like completing a circle to go back there and show the Ranch to my two boys."



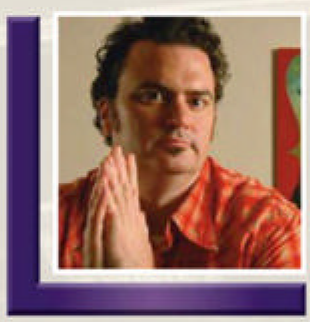
Larry Ahern 1990-2000

ROLE: Artist / animator, game designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? Since 2007 Larry has consulted on videogame and interactive entertainment projects, including Disney theme park attractions.



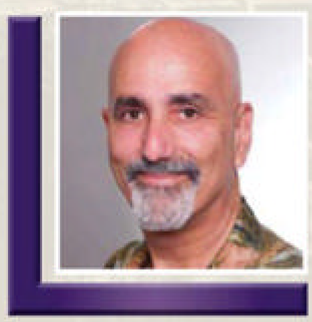
Dave Grossman 1989-1994

ROLE: Game designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? Dave is the design director at Telltale Games, a studio founded and largely staffed by former LucasArts employees, where he's worked since 2005.



Tim Schafer 1989-2000

ROLE: Game designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? Tim founded Double Fine in 2000. Last year he raised $3.5m on Kickstarter to fund a traditional, LucasArts-style adventure game, which is now in production.



Noah Falstein 1984-1992

ROLE: Game designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? After 17 years as a freelance designer, often working with old LucasArts colleagues, Noah recently became the chief game designer at Google.



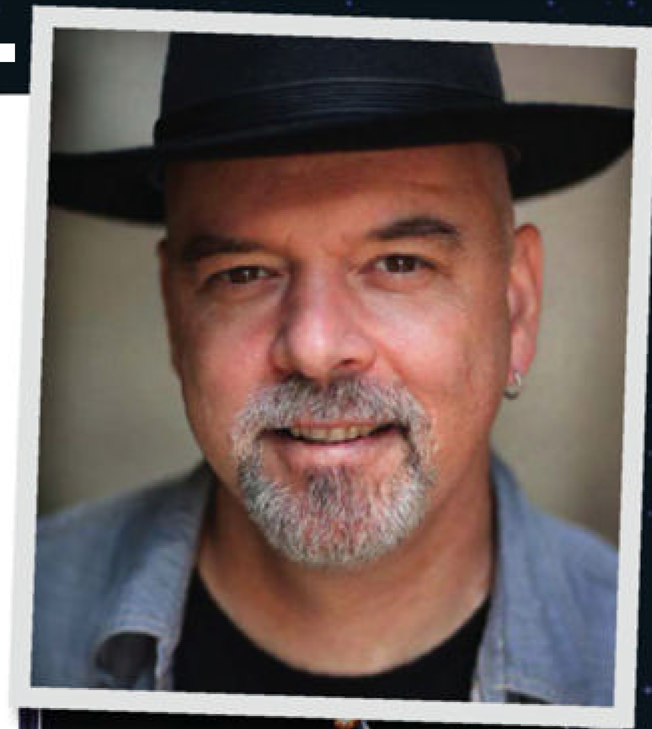
Daron Stinnett 1993-2004

ROLE: Game designer, he later became an executive producer
WHERE IS HE NOW? Daron works for PlayGrid, a game publishing start-up about to announce a new platform for indie games.

Special thanks to Ron Gilbert, Daron Stinnett, Mike Bevan, Kim Wild, John Szczepaniak, Emily Morganti and the staff of LucasArts for all their help with this feature.

A MOMENT WITH…

Peter McConnell



Adding his voice to the chorus of praise for LucasArts in the wake of its demise, composer Peter McConnell speaks to Denis Murphy about his decade of work within the company

Who is Peter McConnell?

Arriving onto the scene with his work on *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*, Peter McConnell went on to work on some of LucasArts' biggest and most memorable titles with his diverse musical talent, and remained there for almost ten years. Since then, he has worked on games such as *Psychonauts* and *Brütal Legend*, but has always had fond memories of his LucasArts years.



» [PC] Peter's favourite title is *Grim Fandango*, a dark comedy adventure written by Tim Schafer.

How did you land your job at LucasArts?
I was living in Boston and working for Lexicon, an audio company that makes high-end digital reverb. I made plans with my college friend Michael Land to come out to California and start a band. He got out here first and got the job as sound department manager at LucasArts. Well, the band fell through, but Michael still needed help developing a sound system and scoring games. I applied for the job, and ended up working there for nearly a decade.

How do you approach your work?
I always focus on visuals first. I like to be in on a project early so I can see the character and background art developing. When I see a picture I usually hear music. Sometimes I'll just hum the tune into a handheld recorder at first and sit with it for a while. Then I turn those rough tunes into short sketches with a sequencer and build them out from there, adding to the production with more polished sounds, and often with live musicians.

Musical influences?
I spent my early childhood in Switzerland, and the earliest music I remember was Mozart, German folk songs and American cowboy music from a band called the Sons of the Pioneers. Besides the usual classics like Beethoven, and cinematic greats like Jerry Goldsmith, John Williams or Bernard Hermann, I like a lot of quirky stuff: Carl Stalling of Looney Tunes fame and Raymond Scott.

Favourite LucasArts composition?
That would probably have to be *Grim Fandango*, which was such a special project in so many ways, and it brought together a number of incredible performing musicians. When we were doing *Grim*, there was a big swing revival in the Mission District in San Francisco. You could go out and hear incredible bands like the Club Foot Orchestra or The Red Hot Skillet Lickers at Bruno's, then stop for a bite at the taqueria around the corner and hear an awesome mariachi band. The whole *Grim* score was made up of musicians from the Mission District scene in the late Nineties, all playing within walking distance of each other. So it had the feeling of coming from some place special, of being part of a musical community.

Can you tell us about any particularly memorable moments during your decade at LucasArts?
I remember very early on when there used to be meetings of all the Lucas companies together at Skywalker Ranch, everyone in Lucasfilm Games (as it was then called) wore a red fez to the meeting. This made us stand out as the odd kids on the block, to say the least. I think my fondest memories were of the camaraderie in the Sound Department, of how we'd go on outings and take instruments with us to jam on and equipment to do field recordings for our sound libraries as part of the festivities. Clint Bajakian was usually in charge of the food, and I was in charge of the wine. We worked really hard in the Sound Department, but we had fun, too, and were a very close-knit group.



» [PC] Peter worked with Tim Schafer, writer of *Grim Fandango*, on later titles such as *Psychonauts*, *Brütal Legend* and *Costume Quest*.



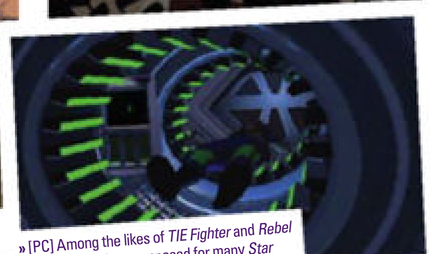
» [PC] The highly acclaimed *Day Of The Tentacle* was the sequel to *Maniac Mansion*, one of the earliest adventure titles to be published by Lucasfilm Games.

What do you think was LucasArts' best era?
Well, I would say most of the 1990s were pretty awesome years, but I think LucasArts always did super high-quality stuff, and some of the most creative and finely crafted work was also some of their most recent. Even though titles like *The Old Republic* were done by an external developer, I don't think people appreciate how much internal work went into them, particularly on the audio side.

How will you personally remember your time LucasArts?
As the place that got me my start doing what I do. I know a lot of folks like me who are grateful for being given that opportunity.

» [PC] Film writer Hal Barwood was the lead designer on *The Fate Of Atlantis*, and strived to create a game worthy of the movies.





» [PC] Among the likes of *TIE Fighter* and *Rebel Assault*, Peter has composed for many *Star Wars* titles, up to the first *Battlefront* title.


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NBA JAM

It brought the thrills of the all-star NBA basketball league to gamers and earned millions of dollars for arcade owners. Mike Bevan gets the low-down on the hugely successful sports game from designer Mark Turmell. Boomshakalaka!



» Mark Turmell's most famous creation prior to *NBA Jam* was the superb *Smash TV*.



» [Arcade] He's on fire!!!

Here's a fun question for you… what are the biggest-earning arcade games of all time? *Pac-Man*? *Space Invaders*? *Donkey Kong*? *Street Fighter II*? Well, they'd all certainly be up there at the top in terms of units sold, but surprisingly, one of the most successful ever coin-ops in terms of actual on-site earnings is a sports-themed title, *NBA Jam*.

On its release in 1993, the game set a new record by grossing $2,468 in just one week at a single location – a record that, as far as we're aware, remains unbroken. Fights broke out in arcades as players scrabbled to play, and cash-boxes literally couldn't be emptied fast enough. Within its first year, the game had earned profits of over a billion dollars in quarters, which journos at the time were quick to point out was roughly three times as much as *Jurassic Park* made at cinemas. Now that's some serious moolah…



Aside from the all-important licence with its digitised likenesses of well-known players, one of the major draws of *NBA Jam* was the outright over-the-top craziness of its play mechanics: gravity-defying dunks with characters jumping ten feet in the air lobbing balls into fiery basketball hoops, and buzzer-beating last-minute three-point lobs.

For lead-designer Mark Turmell, who had previously partnered with Eugene Jarvis on the hit twin-stick shooter *Smash TV*, the project was a chance to realise a boyhood ambition in videogame form. "When I started on the VCS business in the early days, my dream was to own an NBA franchise," Mark explains. "I've always been a huge fan of the NBA and professional sports, and that was my first opportunity to make a sports game.

"We were really excited about digitising real-life characters; we thought that was an interesting technical advantage



» [Arcade] Can you spot Mark's own personal secret character?



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MIDWAY GAMES

» **DEVELOPER:** MIDWAY GAMES

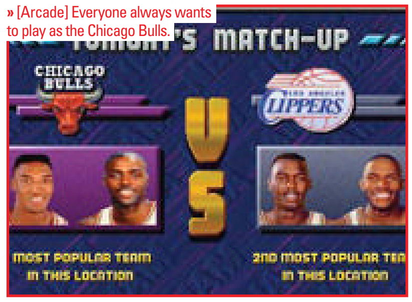
» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE (ORIGINAL), VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS

» **GENRE:** SPORTS



» [Arcade] Portland are ahead against the Bulls in overtime.

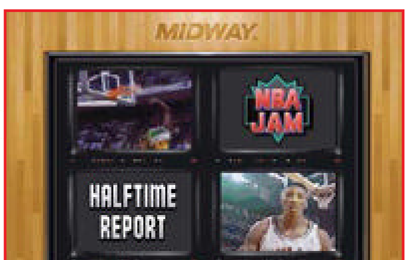


» [Arcade] Everyone always wants to play as the Chicago Bulls.

that we could have, which is why *Mortal Kombat* and *NBA Jam* came about. The NBA was a natural fit for digitising: it had different characters, real-life personalities… it was initially driven by what kind of product would be able to take advantage of this tack."

Although Midway had already released an arcade basketball game called *Arch Rivals*, *NBA Jam* was to become a totally different beast. "I probably only played *Arch Rivals* one or twice," Mark admits. "Although it was a horizontal basketball game, I never really got into the style of graphics: I'm not a big fan of that kind of cartoony look…"

A more direct influence was another Midway title by *Joust* creator John Newcomer, who also worked on the game. "I had finished *Super High Impact Football* with Ed Boon, which was a very high-earning sport game in the arcades," John tells us. "Ed wanted to do *Mortal Kombat* and Mark was looking to start a team to take the *High Impact* formula to the next step with basketball. Mark was sold that the game should be two-on-two so the playfield would not be cluttered."

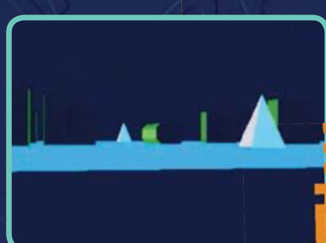


» [Arcade] The half-time interlude features real-life NBA match footage.

> The brilliant inspiration that Mark and his team added was the 'on fire' rule
>
> JOHN NEWCOMER

NBA TANKS

One of *NBA Jam*'s many secrets is the hidden *Battlezone*-style tank game that could be activated on early versions of the game. "We were intrigued with 3D and Atari had that tank game with the little periscope," says Mark, "and we were just geeks trying to learn the technology. One of the programmers, Shawn Liptak, worked on this tank game that allowed you to shoot bullets at tanks on the horizon. The way he implemented it did not require you to pay any money, so people could walk up in the arcade and hit the buttons and move the joystick in the right order and it would trigger this little tank game. When the word spread, we had a lot of operators and distributors calling Midway, really upset that we had provided this free-play experience… I still have one of the letters which is really funny saying 'your programmers are out of control.' Of course in the meantime the game is still making more money than any game in history…"



"We started out with three-on-three and we had the complication of pressing the pass button and deciding who the pass would go to," Mark reveals. "We really wanted to make it simple to pick up and play, which was actually a lesson I learned from Eugene, and when you throw in too many buttons you end up in trouble…"

Along with the simple-to-learn but subtly deep playability, John agrees that the supercharged, physics-defying nature of the gameplay was a huge benefit. "Mark did a great job making this franchise fun," he says. "He took the arcade game approach rather than the 'simulation' approach, where the dunks are superhuman and the guys make those shots when they're needed. You wish in games like this that you could devote even more memory to crazy dunks and off-balance circus shots. The brilliant inspiration that Mark and his team added was the 'on fire' rule. This made the playing strategy very clear and gave an exclamation point visually when you see a blazing ball and net in embers."

Ah yes… the notorious 'on fire' feature of *NBA Jam*. Scoring consecutive baskets causes the super-energetic commentator to yell "He's heating up!" Getting three hoops in a row gives your character superhero-like speed and pyrotechnically charged shot accuracy, as the famous expression "He's on fire!" rings across the basketball court.

"That was an idea that I came up with for the game mechanics itself. We felt the game needed another layer of pizzazz and interest," says Mark. "We had hired a guy to do the play-by-play [commentary] called Tim ▶

Kitzrow, and Tim would just ad-lib stuff like 'Boomshakalaka!' and 'He's on fire!'"

As for the players themselves, the team first looked to local talent. "We grabbed a bunch of local college kids," says Mark. "I literally started driving around playgrounds in Chicago, DePaul University and the YMCA and started talking to people. We rented a space with a basketball hoop and started just going through recording move after move, we got up on a ladder and tried to simulate the perspective, and we went in to hand-touch up and strip out backgrounds from the frames. Then I would go through all these moves and decide what to implement." The heads of the digitised amateurs were then removed and those of NBA players grafted onto their bodies. "It became obvious we had to apply a scale factor to each head and I was toying around with it and ended up making the heads around ten per cent larger so you could recognise what the character was," Mark continues. "It wasn't that I set out to make a game that was over-the-top or exaggerated, I just did a dunk and thought 'that's cool,' then had [the character] jumping a couple of feet higher and went 'well that's cooler…' I kept working; dunk after dunk, just trying to make it look interesting, and that then became the feeling for the game."

Mark reveals how one of the local players, Stephen Howard, went on to actually play in the NBA. "He's now a motivational speaker and he often talks about how he became involved in that project, and how he's proud of all those moves he did for *NBA Jam*!" There were, however, a few notable star omissions. "Michael Jordan was actually in the game when we tested it in Chicago, but we had



» [Arcade] Aerial blocking can be a little tricky to pull off…

> "I then had [the character] jumping a couple of feet higher and went 'well that's cooler'"
>
> MARK TURMELL, GAME DESIGNER

to drop him because he left the NBA. But after the game shipped I got a contacted by a distributor in Seattle, who said 'Hey, I just delivered the game to Gary Payton's house, he wants to be in the game, and he'll pay money for you to add him!' So I added Gary to a special version of the game and sent EPROMs out to the distributor to plug into their various machines. Then I got contacted by Ken Griffey Jr, the [Seattle-based] baseball player, saying he wanted to be in the game too.



» [Arcade] Early versions of the game had secret playable characters from *Mortal Kombat*. Here's Raiden in action.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SNEAKERS
SYSTEM: APPLE II
YEAR: 1980

SMASH TV
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1990

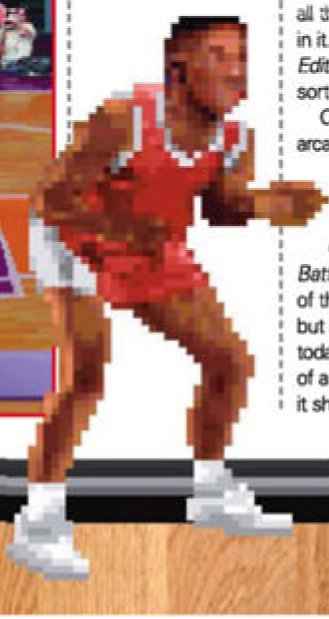
BUBBLE SAFARI
SYSTEM: iOS
YEAR: 2012

Shortly after, Michael Jordan contacted me saying he wanted to be in it too. Even though he'd pulled out originally, he wanted his own special version!"

Strangely for such a massive money-spinner, even the NBA licence was at one point no certainty. "When we first reached out to the NBA and asked if we might be able to put their logo on the side of a cabinet, they said 'absolutely not,' " Mark divulges. "All of the arcades in New York at the time had the image of being seedy, kind of underground strip-clubs or drug hang-outs, and they didn't want their logo associated with that, so we actually had to create a video that presented what a 'family entertainment' centre looked like today – bowling alleys and arcades that were nice and in the suburbs. We had to educate them as to where their logo was going… They eventually agreed to the licence and I think what happened was that it was like wildfire. We not only had a successful product but to this day I meet people that say they became fans of the NBA because of this product; there was a whole new category of fan-base that grew up because of the videogame."

Midway's agreement with the NBA was a surprisingly good deal. "We paid them a royalty for units that were sold, something in the order of $25 a cabinet," Mark reveals. "They made their money on the back-end on consumer products; Williams had a deal with Acclaim to transfer all of our coin-op products like *Mortal Kombat* and *NBA Jam* over to the consoles, so they got a piece of that action as well." The game's popularity wasn't limited to just fans of arcades, and their rapidly profiteering owners. "Shaq O'Neal bought two machines when the game came out," Mark tells us, "one for his home, and the other one he actually travelled with on the road; he would wheel it up to his hotel room and the players would play *NBA Jam* on their road trips, so it became a sort of 'insider' game for the NBA – all the players were playing it and wanted to be in it. And we did a sequel, *NBA Tournament Edition*, that added more players and so it really sort of spiralled out of control…"

One aspect of the game that didn't please arcade operators, or indeed the NBA, was the multitude of hidden 'Easter eggs' in the game, including secret *Mortal Kombat* characters, stat-boosted 'developer' characters and even a free-to-play hidden *Battlezone*-style shoot-'em-up. Later versions of the game patched out many of these quirks, but some remain shrouded in mystery even today. "With *NBA Jam* we did a screenshot of a cheerleader dunking the basketball and it showed up on the cover of *GamePro*

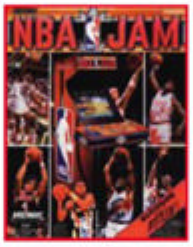




magazine," Mark recalls, "and everybody of course wanted to know the code, because it was also well known that the cheerleaders were *Playboy* bunnies – we'd actually contacted *Playboy* and said we'd wanted models and they sent over some girls! When the word got out, people were looking for their initials and secret codes… We had one girl, Kerri Hoskins, who went on to be Sonya Blade in the *Mortal Kombat* series, who started getting phone calls from kids at home because we'd published her name… A lot of these secret PIN numbers were based on birthdays, so MJT [Mark's secret character] is 322 because my birthday is March 22nd. So a lot of these kids were looking for birthdays because they assumed it was the PIN number for these girls."

On reflection, Mark declares a great deal of satisfaction with *NBA Jam*'s popularity and quarter-wrenching gameplay which so thrillingly recreated a sport he so clearly loves. Asked why he thinks it was so spectacularly successful, he replies: "I guess it was the first arcade game to actually feature these licensed characters. The sport was really blowing up; the NBA had all these superstar players like Shaquille O'Neal, Scottie Pippen and Dennis Rodman, and for the first time you could actually access them in the arcade. That certainly brought in some of the fan base, you know for that first quarter. But as with anything in the videogame business, if you don't have great gameplay you don't get that second quarter, you don't get any additional coin drop. So from my standpoint that question is easily answered purely based on the great gameplay. You need to hook people, you need to make people feel like they are good at the game, and that game did an excellent job."

Thanks to Paul Drury for his original interview with Mark.





» Strong promotion in arcades helped *NBA Jam* become a smash hit for Midway.



» [Arcade] Scottie Pippen re-entering the Earth's atmosphere for a dunk…

EXTREME SPORTS GAMING

More over-the-top sports games

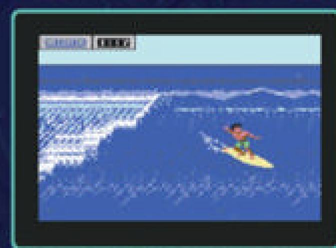
ROCKET BALL (1985)



■ Inspired by the cult movie *Rollerball*, this Commodore 64 exclusive was a rather memorably exciting little game when you consider it was based on the completely fictional sport of roller skating round in circles while punching your opponents in the face… It remains a fast-paced game that, like many other sports titles, really comes alive when played against a human opponent.

CALIFORNIA GAMES (1987)

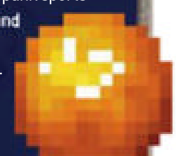
■ Although there's an argument for *Horace Goes Skiing* as the first extreme sports computer game, this instalment of Epyx's *Games* series was the first to feature the likes of surfing, skateboarding and BMX bundled into a single well-presented package. It's received numerous ports over the years, but we personally love the Master System and Lynx versions.



SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE (1990)



■ The Bitmap Brothers' famous cyberpunk sports sequel is one of the most celebrated and biggest-selling games of the 16-bit era, and deservedly so. It's fast, good-looking, violently silly, and above all a whole lot of fun, particularly with a handful of best mates.



NFL BLITZ (1997)

■ Applying the supercharged gameplay that had made *NBA Jam* such a smash, Mark Turmell's second sports title for Midway captured the thrills and spills of the NFL with a new 3D engine, focusing on furious tackles and near-impossible catches and touchdowns. While not quite as polished as *NBA Jam*, it remains an excellent arcade translation of the popular sport.



JET SET RADIO (2000)

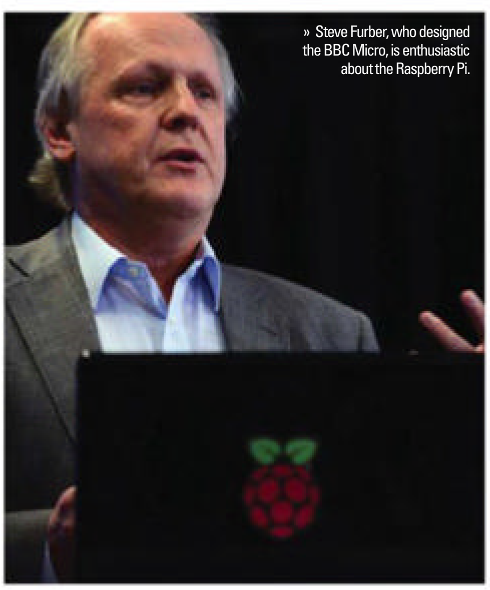


■ The popularity of skateboarding games may have been started by Activision's *Tony Hawk's* franchise, but this gorgeous cel-shaded offering from Smilebit, originally released on Sega's Dreamcast console, is surely the most bizarre, inventive and visually creative of all. It received a superb sequel in 2002 and was recently converted to various digital services, so there's no excuse for not playing it.

INSIDE THE BBC MICRO



It was the computer that inspired a generation of programmers and introduced scores of children to computing. David Crookes talks to BBC Micro designer Steve Furber about how the iconic machine was made



» Steve Furber, who designed the BBC Micro, is enthusiastic about the Raspberry Pi.

The phone rings and Steve Furber picks it up. He listens to what the person on the other end has to say; he begins to feel uneasy. But the caller, Hermann Hauser, is desperate. As the co-founder of Acorn he is about to receive a visit from the BBC, which wants to create a new computer. Acorn is in the running to make it. But time is tight. He wants Steve Furber and his colleague Sophie Wilson to produce a functioning machine in less than a week.

"Can you have a processor like this for Friday?" Hauser asks, but Steve is clear. "No," he answers. He calls Wilson and gets the same answer. But in both cases, he pulls a trick. "He told us both that the other had said yes so we felt we had to agree," laughs Steve. "We were then committed." The BBC Micro was about to be born.

Many people have fond memories of the BBC Micro. It was the machine used in countless schools up and down Britain, the red keys and black/beige combination being an exciting pointer to the future. Steve, however, did not have the pleasure of playing around with computers when he was at Manchester Grammar School in the 1960s. Nor did he have a bank of machines available to him when he moved on to study the Mathematical Tripos at St John's College, Cambridge.

Steve was interested in the emerging technology, however, and while he was working on his PhD, he began to find the idea of computers rather fascinating. He decided he wanted to write his thesis electronically and in order to be able to do so, there was just one option available to him. He had to build his own machine. "In those days if you wanted to write a thesis electronically you had to build a computer and then you had to write a text editor. Then you could start writing the thesis. That's the way it was," he explains.

He found designing computers to be a lot of fun. In 1978, he was appointed the Rolls-Royce Research Fellow in Aerodynamics at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, which gave him even more of an excuse to play around: suddenly it made it a practical thing for him to do. Steve was also a member of



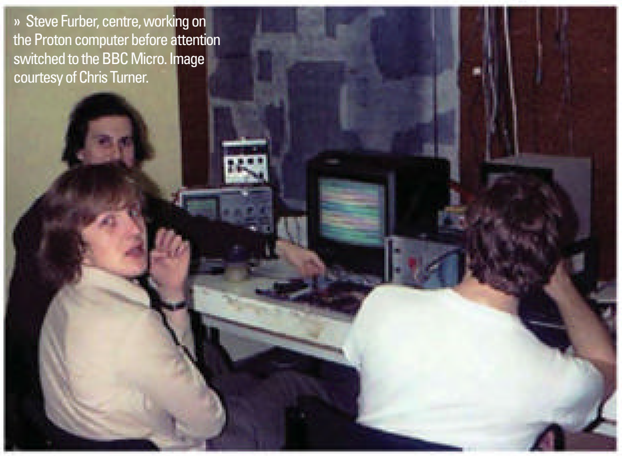
his university's processor group, which was full of many other students who built computers for the hell of it.

"I ended up with what was a hobbyist machine," he says with fond recollection. "It used a 6502 processor and it was built in a subrack. It had this little 160mm by 100mm Eurocard [the European standard format for PCB cards] and I hand-wired the components to connect them. The machine had a memory card and a display card and the key principle of operation was that the machine was designed so that the processor and the display had shared access to the memory."

In 1978, Acorn Computing was formed, rather handily, in Cambridge and Steve worked there on a casual basis before becoming an employee in 1980. The timing could not have been better because the BBC was about to embark on an ambitious project – one that Steve would prove to be an integral part of. ▶

IN THE KNOW

LAUNCH DATE: 1 December 1981
LAUNCH PRICE: £235 (Model A)
DIMENSIONS: 41x34.5x6.5cm
WEIGHT: 3.7kg
PROCESSOR:
2MHz MOS Technology 6502
RAM: 16KB **ROM:** 32KB
ON-BOARD LANGUAGE: BASIC
DISPLAY:
640 x 256 (2 colours), 320 x 256 (4 colours) or 160 x 256 (16 colours)
COLOURS: 16 colours in total
SOUND: Texas Instruments SN76489, four channels, mono
ASSOCIATED MAGAZINES:
BBC Micro User (later *The Micro User*), *Beebug*, *Your Computer*


» Steve Furber, centre, working on the Proton computer before attention switched to the BBC Micro. Image courtesy of Chris Turner.



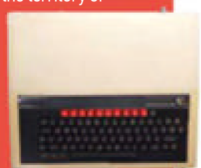
» The BBC Micro had plenty of outputs, making it extremely versatile.

BBC VARIANTS

Later models of the popular home computer and how they differed

MODEL A

■ Costing £299, which was a whopping amount in 1981, the BBC's Model A machine may have been the cheapest version but was firmly in the territory of rich parents (or at least those who were inspired by seeing the machine in schools). It has a 6502A processor, 2MHz speed, 16KB RAM expandable to 32, 32K ROM and three-channel sound.



MODEL B

■ With Model A having seen off competition from the likes of Sinclair Research to bag the BBC Micro contract, Model B was a small enhancement, allowing its 32KB of RAM to expand to 64K. Whereas Model A was made to run with a tape recorder, however, B could use a 5.25-inch floppy drive and it could also use software made to run on the disk operating system CP/M.



MASTER 128

■ In 1986, Acorn devised the Micro's successor, the BBC Master 128. As the name suggests, it has 128KB of RAM. Although it promised backwards compatibility, it wasn't as smooth as the makers would have liked, but it was a speedier machine and there were two cartridge slots above the new numerical keyboard. It ditched the 6502 CPU in favour of the 65SC12.



MASTER COMPACT

■ A more unusual machine than the rest, the Compact had a keyboard with a motherboard built in, together with a second unit on which the monitor sat, containing a power supply and a 3.5-inch drive (the smaller floppies being seen as standard at this point). There were no cartridge slots and it cost a strange £451.25. The keyboard used a rubber-plastic moulding membrane.



▶ In 1981, The BBC had a couple of television channels, four national radio stations and lots of regional presenters around the country to provide local content. BBC Online did not exist. Radio 5 Live was years away. As for the digital TV channels, well even Sky hadn't launched in the UK at this stage.

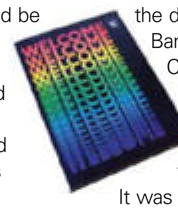
But broadcasting wasn't the only thing on the mind of BBC executives. What was concerning the BBC more than anything was computing. The broadcaster sensed that there was a growing interest in technology of this kind, with children becoming turned on to arcades, electronic games proving popular and a range of build-your-own computer kits being all the rage with the dads. So it began to put out feelers for a new computer that it wanted to lend its name to.

Many companies were approached by the BBC. The idea was that the new machine would be at the centre of a series of television programmes based on the rise of the microprocessor and the fact they were becoming increasingly important. The programmes would be practical and hands on, encouraging viewers to go away and reproduce what they saw. To do this properly, the BBC felt the series would need to be based on a particular machine.

"The BBC had a spec for the computer and they went around a number of UK companies basically seeing who wanted to build it," says Steve. "It was a competitive process, the details of which I'm not familiar with."

At the time, Acorn had been designing a machine that was going to be called Proton. This was to be the successor to the Atom computer that was in production, selling quite well and leading to a desire for a follow-up machine. "We sketched the Proton," says Steve. "We sketched it based on the machine I had designed at university. It was designed as a dual processor. We realised that 16-bit processors were coming and we wanted to use the 8-bit processor as an I/O front end and have a second processor attached to a generic interface. So there was a sketch but no more than a sketch, and certainly not a diagram."







When the BBC Computer Literacy Project began asking for companies to bid for the rights to manufacture the new machine, it was decided that the Proton would be used as the base. The focus swiftly moved towards producing something that would impress the BBC when they came calling and as well as designing the innards, attention was also paid to what was going to wrap around it.

Step forward industrial designer Alan Boothroyd who designed the casing. This was produced in the same week that the prototype innards were being created. It was important for Acorn to be able to show off not only what was inside but what it would look like on the outside too. "When the BBC were due to come that Friday, we wanted to have the model of the case on one desk giving an idea of the design and on the other desk we wanted a working, wired circuit board so we could say this is what it will work like," says Steve.

Progress was fast on the latter. "First we had the detailed circuit diagram, then we got Ramanuj Banerjee from the Cambridge University Computer Lab in to wire-wrap the circuit," remembers Steve. "At this point, we had to debug the machine to make it work and what we had on that Friday was not the final BBC Micro circuit but it was pretty close. It was strongly based on my machine which had become the Proton, as I've said. For cost reasons the BBC Micro was just the front end of the dual processes we conceived, although of course the BBC Micro gained second processors."

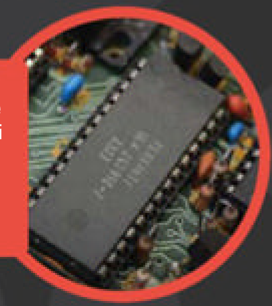
The BBC Micro went from a sketch to a functioning machine in less than a week, which was a major triumph for the team. Acorn emerged as the winner. It was asked to build and design the BBC Micro to a spec that would be agreed with the BBC. "I think one of the things that influenced them into choosing Acorn was the fact we could move so fast," says Steve. "They'd been dealing with other companies who had made less progress in a year than we made in a week, so, who knows, that's my impression of it." As for the external design, the red keys of the keyboard that was showcased that day became the BBC trademark and they remained across many Acorn products with a BBC link. ▶

BBC MICRO: HOW IT WORKS

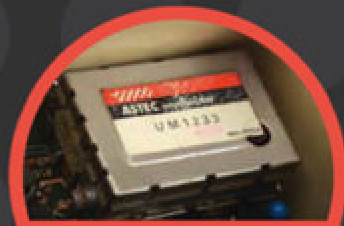
The inside of a BBC Micro may not be as recognisable as the red-keyed casing on the outside, but this is what it looked like…



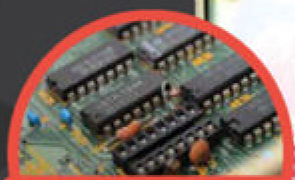
POWER SUPPLY
The wider shot also shows the Astec switch-mode power supply and the keyboard.



SERIAL PROCESSOR
The custom chip at the top-centre is a Ferranti ULA. It is the serial processor, handling the RS232 and audio cassette interfaces.



TV CONNECTION
The silver 'ASTEC' box is a UHF modulator, which enables the BBC Micro's display output to be connected directly into the aerial socket on an analogue TV.



ECONET COMPONENTS
The empty chip locations at the top left are for the Econet components. Acorn had developed Econet on the Atom, under the guidance of Andy Hopper who was leading research on networking at the Cambridge Computer Lab. The BBC Micro gave many schools very early access to computer network technology, including file servers and email, long before the wider population was even aware of the internet (and ten years before the world wide web was created by Tim Berners-Lee).

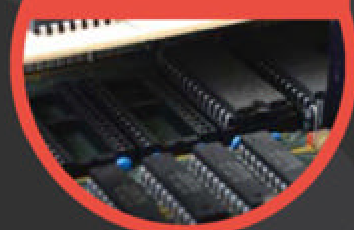
HEATSINK
The video processor ULA has a big black heatsink on it, centre right. The processor had given the team a lot of trouble with overheating.



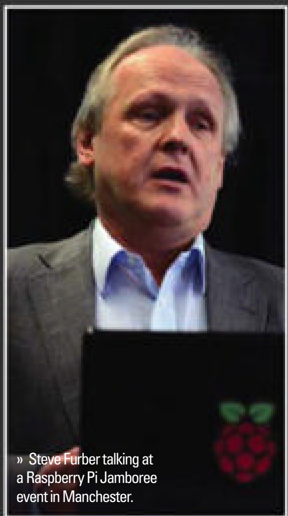
SPEECH CHIP SOCKETS
The two large sockets at centre left are for the speech chips – the BBC Micro had a canned Kenneth Kendall speech synthesis system, to give it an authoritative BBC voice.

MANUFACTURER
The sticker here shows that the BBC Micro was made by a company called ICL. This firm was the major British mainframe computer manufacturer and it was bought by Fujitsu in the 1990s.

ROM SOCKETS
The row of five sockets at the bottom right are for the ROMs. This machine has a DFS – Disk Filing System – ROM in addition to the BBC MOS and BASIC ROM.



STEVE **FURBER ON** DAVID **BRABEN**


» Steve Furber talking at a Raspberry Pi Jamboree event in Manchester.

■ Although David Braben is perhaps the best-known gaming 'celebrity' for the BBC Micro, his sterling work on *Elite* with Ian Bell proving to be of real lasting value, Steve Furber and David Braben did not meet for a long time, and certainly not prior to the game's launch.

"I think we have been in the same room at some point, but my first knowledge of David Braben was when *Elite* came out on the BBC Micro, which was the most spectacular game we've ever seen."

Not that Steve rates the space trading game – which some claim to be the best slice of interactive entertainment ever made – as the one title he would prefer to play on the system. "My favourite game is actually *Aviator* because my profession was aerodynamics. I was always very interested in aeroplanes as a boy and *Aviator* gave me the opportunity to fly my own aeroplane on BBC Micro. There was a dynamic with aeroplanes and a dynamic with spaceships, so *Aviator* was the key application for me. That was the fulfilment of why I started playing with computers. I thought of them as a way to do a flight simulator."

With the BBC convinced Acorn could deliver, it was time to start turning the prototype into a manufacturable machine. Steve's design for the Proton was not the BBC's starting spec and there was much discussion as to what the final spec should be. But the effort, Acorn felt, was more than worth it. The BBC was confident that 12,000 machines would be sold on the back of the TV programmes. "We now know that was a huge underestimate," says Steve. "Nobody foresaw the rising interest and the huge volume of interest in developing computers in the early Eighties. The 12,000 became 1.5 million machines in about five years."

First of all, though, they had to move on from the prototype. "The prototype was around April… in 1981 and the machine was launched… far less than a year later," Steve says. "We'd decided to reduce the number of chips by using the ULAs in a couple of functions. We created the video ULA which divided the 16MHz master clock into lower frequencies for use by other integrated circuits and serialised the display memory into an RGB video signal."

The ULA was an Uncommitted Logic Array, a Ferranti product that allowed a number of logic gates to be configured to implement a bespoke function on a single chip. In the process of making the BBC Micro, the number of chips needed was reduced by "10 or 20" Steve reckons, adding that there were still 102 chips left on the BBC Micro board. "A lot of effort went into cleaning up schematics, getting the circuit board PCB and ULAs inside and implemented, and of course building the software," he recalls. "That was at least as big a job as getting hardware out. My involvement was mainly hardware, though."

BBC BASIC was written by Sophie Wilson and Paul Bond, who led the development of the OS. "There were a lot of people involved in getting the machine ready to sail in January, where ready is a relative term," adds Steve. "The initial machines were shipped with poor power supplies – they got too hot. They were linear and were rapidly replaced with switching power supplies that did not get hot and were very reliable. But there is a problem if you have a BBC Micro today: the electrolytic capacitors in those switching supplies are drying out, so they need replacing. Then again, the machines are 30 years old."

While the team worked on producing the BBC Micro, the broadcaster's learning arm remained close to the project. "It was a collaboration because the BBC kept a stern grip of what's happening and all specification issues had to be agreed with the BBC," says Steve. "So yes, they were very firmly involved. The badge was not just a brand – [it] represented a lot of technical input from [the] BBC."

One big concern was the pressure to keep the costs down while not compromising quality or reliability. It was a struggle. "I think the realisation that there was a huge education market came a little bit later, once the machine was underway," reveals Steve. "One of the criticisms of the machine was it was a bit too expensive, though. Of course we didn't engineer it with a view to the cost running away, but we did engineer it to be good and to be robust and high quality and that pushed the price up. The BBC Micro keyboard would really take a hammering and it was expensive because the only way you could build a robust keyboard then was expensive."

He says the BBC wanted to go even further and its key input was to come up with ideas of the sorts of things they wanted: to retain the second processor capability; and to be able to add floppy disk drives later, even though they were phenomenally expensive. "They wanted to add a Prestel receiver. This is before the days of

BBC MICRO **EXCLUSIVES**

If you're picking up a Micro, these are the games you need to own



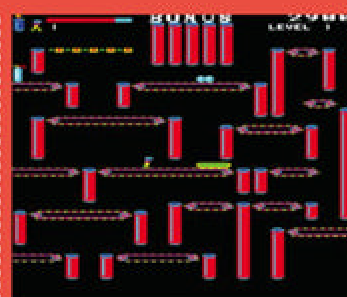
STRYKER'S RUN

■ Designed by Chris Roberts and Philip Mellor, this colourful 2D side-scroller was released for the BBC Micro and BBC Master. It was part of a prolific run by Superior Software on the Beeb machines and this was arguably one of its biggest hits as players took control of Commander John Stryker, blasting enemies on a mission to deliver vital intelligence.



MAGIC MUSHROOMS

■ As a single-screen platformer with nine levels, *Magic Mushrooms* wasn't quite as trippy as the name would suggest but still a fine, sanitised clone of *Manic Miner*. The difficulty level was quite high, though – it was hard not to mistime jumps, get frustrated by moving platforms or be forever climbing the same ladders on the way to collect lots of mushrooms.



FELIX MEETS THE EVIL WEEVILS

■ The final part of the *Felix* trilogy was a standard platform game with the obligatory collectables. The hero had to put up with some Evil Weevils that had not only managed to get themselves into the factory but were out to kill. A little piece of trivia: the game was originally going to be called *Felix Meets The Weevils*.



» The cute owl symbol soon became iconic with owners.

» Ports allowed you to connect the BBC Micro up to a variety of different devices, including printers and similar peripherals.



the internet," says Steve. "And they were keen to have ways of distributing software to go with their programmes so we built a system that would pick up unused lines from Prestel, which is the old digital information overlaid on the analogue TV transmission. The unused spare lines could be used for delivering software to the machine. That was a box you could buy. The BBC Micro wasn't cheap, but you could pick up free software off the air."

The BBC wanted a lot of input-output devices. "One of the things that made the BBC Micro so useful was the number of things you could plug in – joysticks, analogue things, a wide range of peripherals. You could almost fill a desk with BBC Micro peripherals if you plugged them all in at once. That did seem to push the budget a bit," laughs Steve. But it sold. As we have seen, it shifted hundreds of thousands of units and Steve says everyone was surprised although there were some early indicators. "In 1982 we agreed to do a seminar at the Institution of Electrical Engineers in London, now the Institution of Engineering and Technology. They often run seminars and get 200 or 300 people there. At the BBC Micro seminar people booked coach trips from Birmingham, and three times the number of people arrived than could fit in the room. They had to send two-thirds of the people home because they couldn't fit them in because of health and safety. So we ended up doing the seminar two more times but, yes, that told us this machine was going to be big." Today, he says the legacy continues. Although Britain doesn't produce boxed computers today, the UK remains hugely influential in the global computer business. One of the spin-offs from Acorn was ARM, which is now responsible for powering 75 per cent of the devices connected to the internet. ARM is a huge global force.

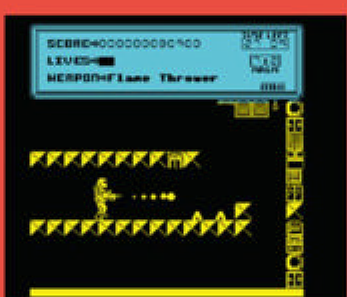
"The BBC Micro keyboard would really take a hammering"
STEVE FURBER

"Last year more ARM processors shipped than Intel had shipped in its entire 45-year history. Cambridge Silicon Radio has a very strong position in Bluetooth too and there are several British companies that are highly influential in this game."

Things have also turned full circle for Steve. He is excited by the Raspberry Pi which has the backing of David Braben, the creator of the BBC Micro's most famous game, *Elite*. Like the BBC Micro, the Pi is being delivered to schools to help children to learn. Steve believes things went off track when children were "locked out" of computing by graphical user interfaces. "The major use of computers is in business for people to use for work, so that's why we don't expect people to get their hands dirty with code on a day-to-day basis," he notes. "But with the BBC Micro, you could turn the machine on and be in a programming environment. I still meet people who tell me that the Beeb was a career-changing event for them. That's what they used to started programming… The graphical user interfaces were not bad – not everybody wants to program… or [has] the mindset required to be reasonable programmers, so you have to deliver machines to different levels. But at the moment, too many people who would otherwise find programming very engaging are being turned off by PowerPoint and all of those other apps schools teach children to learn."

In the end, nine BBC branded computers were produced. The BBC Micro is considered as the catch-all term for the Model A, B, B+64, B+128, Master 128, and Master Compact. Subsequent models are considered as part of Acorn's Archimedes series.

"They were hugely exciting times," says Steve. "It was the first point in history where you could really start putting computers into everybody's hands. It was a great time to be involved."



BEYOND INFINITY – CUTE TO KILL

■ With a brilliant pulsating soundtrack, this game was Spectrum-like in appearance: the monochrome graphics didn't really do the BBC Micro justice even if they were well drawn. And yet get beyond that and into the realms of this single-player sci-fi shoot-'em-up platformer and you found you had a great game on your hands.



COSMIC CAMOUFLAGE

■ It is a clone of *Asteroids*, but *Meteors* sequel *Cosmic Camouflage* is an example of a solid release from Acornsoft. It was highly praised by *Electron User* magazine and it was bundled on a compilation with *Play It Again Sam 4*, *Frak!*, *Spellbinder* and *Grand Prix Construction Set*. Lots of spot effects pierce the eardrums as your red ship's ammo eats into yellow rock.



GALAFORCE

■ Superior Software's *Galaforce* by Kevin Edwards was a shmup that threw you straight into the action, your ship flailing left and right as you hammered the fire button to ward off invaders. You would get a brief respite of mere seconds before waves of more pink and green nasties came your way. Carnage and beauty and a relentless noise of fire to annoy the teachers.

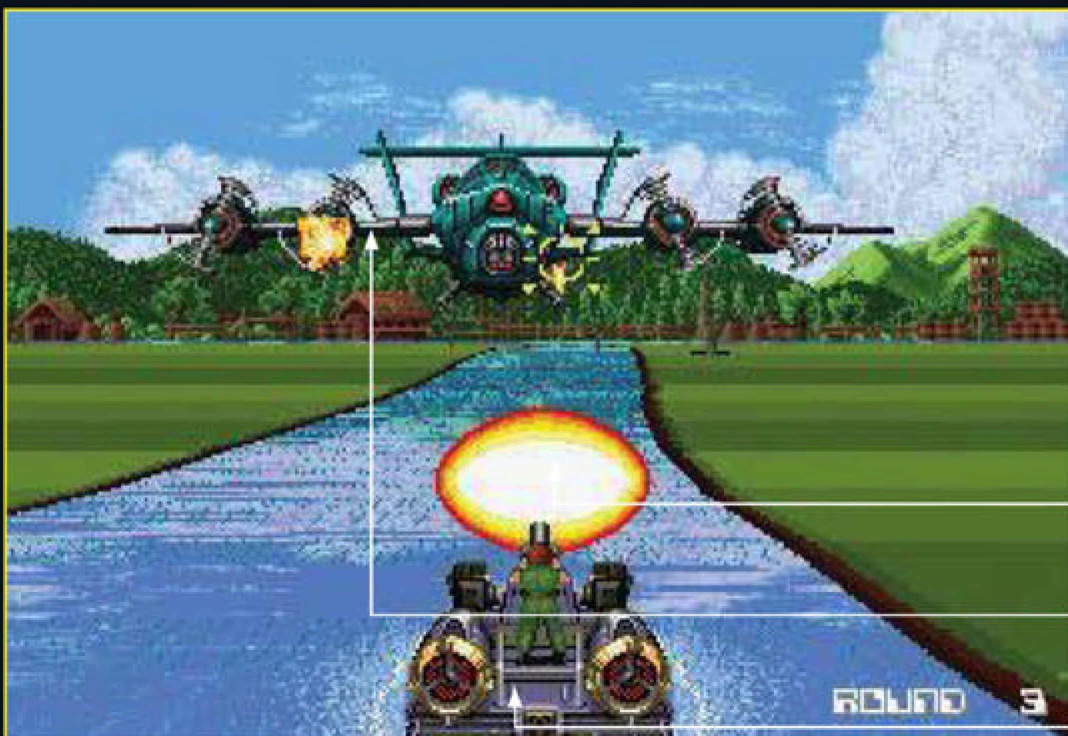


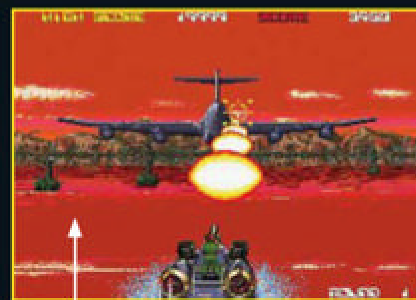
DUNJUNZ

■ Bug Byte's *Dunjunz* was a clone of *Gauntlet*, but it had real depth. Allowing up to four players, this was an action adventure involving a Ranger, Wizard, Barbarian and Warrior searching for the Chalice. The characters had their own quirks and use and this helped to notch up the gameplay from mere button bashing. A sterling effort by programmer Julian Avis.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





» Levels take place across water and land. Water makes your craft easier to steer while land makes it bump all over the shop.

» You can't pick up extra weapons during the game. Instead, you must make do with a rocket launcher and this giant-boiled-egg-launcher-posing-as-a-plasma-rifle.

» As well as enemy gunfire, you must avoid and circumvent various obstacles; this is done by pressing the jump button or putting your foot down.

» This is you: a hovercraft manned by a couple who may or may not be romantically linked but share a love of hovercrafts and hatred for Banglar.

AQUA JACK

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year:** 1990 ■ **Genre:** Rail-shooter

■ **There just aren't enough hovercrafts in videogames, and why that's the case is baffling to us, and probably us only. The versatile craft is perfect for a vehicle combat shooter, given its ability to travel across both land and water. And while it's probably not the best for taking bullets, a game based around one has the clear advantage of being able to contain all manner of land- and sea-dwelling things, from fish, boats and fishermen to jeeps, helicopters, seaweed, deadly flotsam, Tom Petty, anything you can fathom.**

In terms of its looks and theme, *Aqua Jack* keeps things militant and could almost be an offshoot of Taito's *Operation Wolf*, except its design is more akin to sprite-scaling racing/shooters like Taito's own *Chase HQ* and Namco's superb *Lucky & Wild*. You play a woman-and-man duo on a mission to stop the nasty Banglar – that blue-suited businessman rent-a-villain who looks like a grey Yoda and also appeared in Taito's earlier *Ninja Warriors*. Banglar has a strong army comprised of men with guns, boats with more guns, helicopters with loud guns, fighter planes with guns, and a few trains carrying said vehicles and therefore plenty of guns. However, he is also stupid enough to build his base on a waterway, meaning someone with a weaponised hovercraft has an open window to topple the freakish-looking despot.

This mission takes place across eight stages and in each you must survive attack from everything we've just mentioned, but also avoid clumsily animated obstructions which look like they were added a minute before the game shipped. Dodging these dangers is done by speeding up and slowing down your craft or making it bunny hop, or hitting ramp-like objects *A-Team* style – and as ramps are universally fun, the game initially seems awesome.

But while it's enjoyable at first, our opinion of *Aqua Jack* began to sink after a while. Overall the visuals look nice, but the hit detection and animation isn't as solid as it should be, and when the action does get thick and ferocious the visuals and gameplay become a bit messy. It also doesn't help that you don't have a health bar. Instead, your vehicle explodes after taking a single hit and so the action feels a bit stop/start. It's no *Operation Wolf* or *Chase HQ*, but in terms of offering arcade thrills, *Aqua Jack* still manages to keep afloat, just about.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

CHASE HQ 1988

Aqua Jack looks and plays like the child of *Operation Wolf* and *Chase HQ*. *Chase* received some cracking ports on 8-bit micros; we recommend you check out the Speccy and CPC versions.

SWAT POLICE

■ **Developer:** ESD ■ **Year:** 2001 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

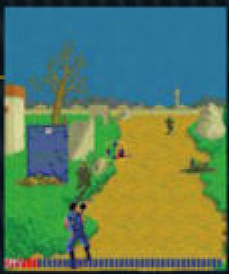


» [Arcade] Blast away at the cannon-fodder enemies in this generic-looking but enjoyable shooter for one or two players.

■ **At first glance, *SWAT Police* looks like a garish *Cabal*-type shooter.** The two player-heroes look identical and badly dressed, the levels look generic, there's nothing remotely resembling a story, and the enemies are lacking in variety and comprise an odd mixture of men in brightly coloured suits and brightly coloured flying robots. And yet somehow it still managed to win us over. Maybe we're in a good mood today, who knows? But the gameplay we found to be silly, mindless fun, the controls and hit detection surprisingly solid and the blasting away of its smartly dressed cannon fodder quite addictive. What we also liked is that between levels – which are a mixture of static one-screen stages and scrolling stages – you can use the money you earn from shooting things to level up items and purchase other useful stuff. You can increase the speed of your characters, their power and even upgrade their weapons. Add to this a nice range of neat and meaty-feeling weapons and you have a wholly generic but still enjoyable blaster.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

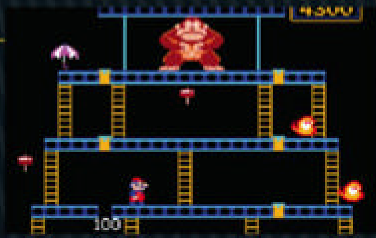
CABAL 1988



Looking for an into-the-screen blaster in which your character appears to have an invisible force field preventing humans and vehicles from invading his personal space? Then look no further than TAD Corporation's *Cabal*. It was ported to many 8-bit computers and consoles.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

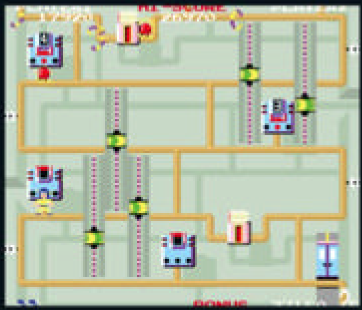
DONKEY KONG 1981



Atomic Boy's design is akin to *Donkey Kong*, most closely its final 'rivets' stage. We haven't the space to list everything the game appeared on – basically anything popular not made by Sega.

ATOMIC BOY

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Platformer



» [Arcade] Climb around the pipes, flicking switches and jumping on generators to zap enemies with electricity.

■ **This quirky platformer looks a bit like *Impossible Mission* and *Donkey Kong* have done some freaky business and delivered us a boffin baby.** Though gameplay-wise it could be deemed a bit on the repetitious side, owing to the fact there's little variety in the design and look of its stages, *Atomic Boy* is simple to grasp and pretty addictive too. Also going by the arcade alias of *Wily Tower* – not to be confused with the mini-game that appeared in the rare Mega Man Mega Drive game *Wily Wars* [like that would even be remotely probable – Ed], *Atomic Boy* sees you play the role of a little electrician guy who looks a bit like a Death Star Trooper. He must carefully make his way up a framework of pipes, avoiding deadly robots and electric currents, to flick off a series of switches in order to shut down a computer. As well as these important switches, the levels feature generators which, if jumped on, send out an electric charge that can be used as a weapon against the roaming enemies. *Atomic Boy* is simple in concept, but good fun nonetheless.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

PARALLEL TURN

■ **Developer:** Jaleco ■ **Year:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Sports

■ **Clearly attempting to ride on the coat tails of *Track & Field*, released a year earlier, this button-bashing ski-themed sports sim by Jaleco doesn't quite measure up to Konami's coin-op smash.** The concept of *Parallel Turn* is a sound one, however: it pits your dexterity and skills at how fast you can pummel a single button across a series of ski disciplines which range from the always popular 'trying to outrun the ski lift to get to the front of the pack' event, to high-jumping and military patrol (skiing and target shooting in case you're wondering). The graphics are pretty dull and dreadful and the gameplay and entertainment value is a bit on the shallow side. In fact, once you've played through it once you'll be unlikely to feed it any more money. What this (and many games) miss is some kind of hot tub stage, the design of which we're not decided on but all we know is there needs to be a hot tub in a stage. Hot tubs aside, *Parallel Turn* probably seemed unique among the arcade games of the time, but we're not surprised that it fell under the radar and failed to see a release on home formats.



Minority Report

The sprawling games library of Atari's 8-bit home computer line is put under the spotlight this month as Rory Milne looks at great titles that may have been overlooked by some, but are fondly remembered by others. How many of the following have you played?



Special ATARI 8-BIT Special



» [Atari 8-bit] Split-second timing is required to avoid getting stamped on by these giant clown shoes.

HENRY'S HOUSE

■ DEVELOPER: CHRIS MURRAY ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Although its storyline had initially been intended to take advantage of the then topical birth of Prince Harry, *Henry's House* ended up receiving a surreal plot all of its own. The first twist is that young Henry's dad, the king, is an amateur boffin who has foolishly left his lab unlocked. Predictably, Henry can't resist taking a quick unsupervised tour, which neatly leads to a scene-setting second plot twist as Henry gulps down an experimental concoction he finds sitting on his father's workbench and promptly shrinks to six inches tall.**

With the back story taken care of, the player is tasked with reuniting the now diminutive royal with his monarch/scientist dad in the hope that he can come up with an antidote. This is made all the more difficult by the fact that the palace you have to guide Henry safely around is now giant, meaning that normally harmless household objects have become potentially deadly threats. And conveniently, for the longevity of the game, Henry's science geek father is dealing with kingly duties at the other end of the royal household. By way of cranking up the difficulty another notch, the keys needed to unlock each palace room are now far out of reach of his royal shortness, which adds treacherous climbing to the game's proceedings.

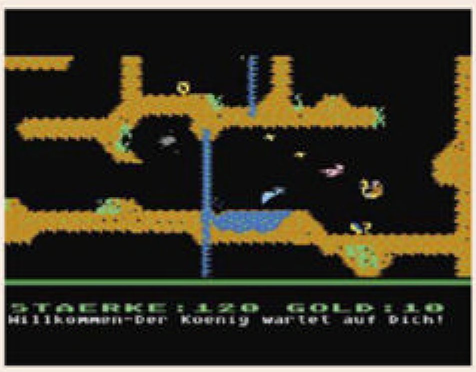
Henry's House requires exact timing and positioning of the player character, but this doesn't adequately explain the demanding nature of this brightly coloured and attractive platformer. The game simply allows no room for error; but in doing so, while always



» MISSION

■ DEVELOPER: JANUSZ PELC ■ YEAR: 1991

■**Arriving late in** the Atari 8-bit line's commercial lifespan, *Mission*, or *Misja* as the original Polish version was known, is a winning combination of platformer and run-and-gun. The aim of the game is to infiltrate an enemy's huge military complex – and having done so, locate four information canisters and make your way back to the exit where a helicopter awaits. Standing between the player and victory are numerous enemy forces and armaments that require either a well-thrown grenade or well-timed jump to get past. Although a late arrival, *Mission* is an accomplished title, boasting nicely animated sprites, well-thought-out levels and a vast playfield.



» CAVELORD

■ DEVELOPER: PETER FINZEL ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **Due to it** being an Atari 8-bit series system exclusive, and one seemingly only released in Germany, *Cavelord* isn't at all well known. The game puts you in charge of Telos and his winged horse Pegamis, with the objective of collecting three pieces of a crown and returning them to a king. The crown pieces can be found in two vast smoothly scrolling caves, which become easier to navigate once you master the game's highly responsive controls. Impressively animated obstacles and flying creatures sap your strength, while magical objects replenish it. What makes *Cavelord* so easy to recommend, though, is its slick and addictive gameplay.



» SPACE LOBSTERS

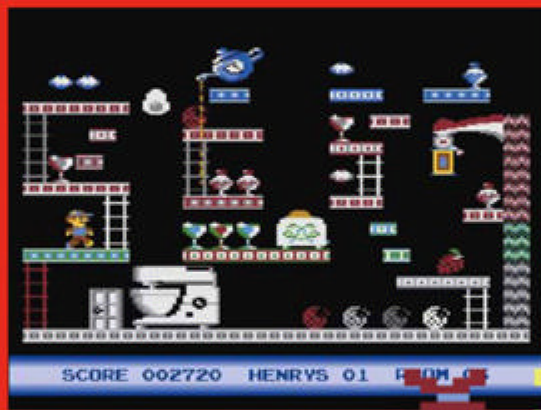
■ DEVELOPER: IVAN MACKINTOSH ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Ivan Mackintosh's *Space*** *Lobsters* marks one of several outings for his cute creation Crumble, promoted here to Captain Crumble, of the starship Columbus. The best way to explain *Space Lobsters*' gameplay is probably to say that it doesn't fit neatly into any one genre. There's a certain amount of shooting lobsters, but the game also has secondary elements such as trading points for ammo and extracting hidden codes from Columbus's various computer terminals. *Space Lobsters*' other asset lies in its glorious visuals, with the trade-off being a small main play area; but this is a minor issue, and not one that effects the overall enjoyment of the game.

» [Atari 8-bit] Only a few items left to collect, but a giant toothbrush guards the exit.



» [Atari 8-bit] The kitchen needs to be cleared up if you want to progress.



» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

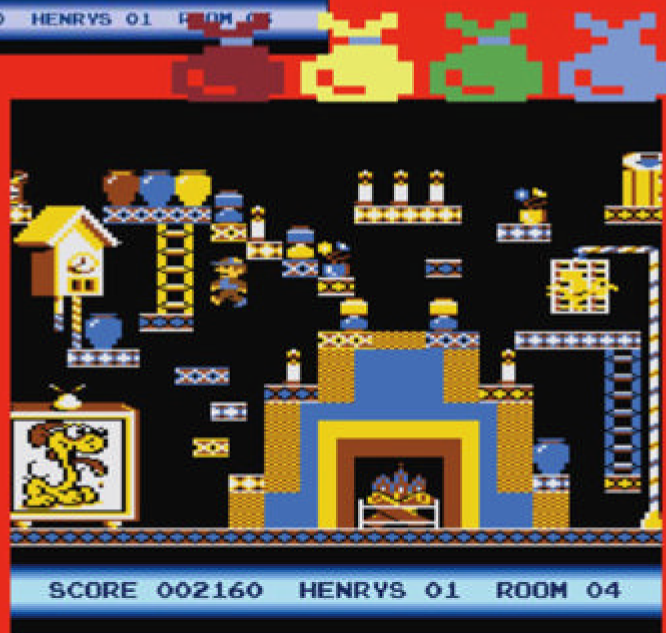
- The first models in Atari's 8-bit home computer series, the 400 and 800, were launched in 1979.
- As you would expect, given Atari's heritage, its computers were designed with gaming in mind.
- Atari's XEGS console was based on one of its last 8-bit computers, the 65XE.

remaining fair, it becomes a highly compulsive proposition.

The play area is split into eight differently themed palace rooms, each with correspondingly themed hazards and items requiring collection. That's not to say that merely collecting every item in a room allows you to progress, as it doesn't – you also have to obtain a key to unlock the next room, which doesn't appear until you have certain objects in your possession. Predictably, and by way of placing the player in further jeopardy, keys always materialise in the part of the room that's most inconvenient to reach. This generally means that the player has to backtrack along the path they've taken, avoiding that room's many obstacles and opponents for a second time.

Henry's House shouldn't be judged on toughness alone, though. Due attention should be given to the title's sparkling visuals, which make excellent use of the host system's extensive colour palette and really jump off the screen. The game also has so many nice touches in terms of gameplay, especially in its use of surreal humour; a high point being the screen-sized killer toothbrush – complete with brushing sounds, flying roast turkeys and demented cuckoo clock.

Aesthetics aside, *Henry's House* offers a real challenge to those seeking the sort of unforgiving platform action that fell out of fashion along with the 8-bit home computer, when miners and moles passed the genre's baton to plumbers and hedgehogs. Thankfully, though, the surreal humour linked to platform games didn't go anywhere, and the fact that *Henry's House* has that in spades will hopefully ensure its place in platforming history – in spite of its sheer difficulty!



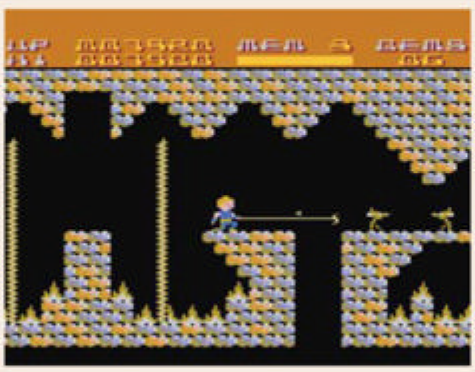
» [Atari 8-bit] Easy does it, one wrong move could set off the demented cuckoo clock.



» ZONE X

■ DEVELOPER: DEREK JOHNSTON ■ YEAR: 1985

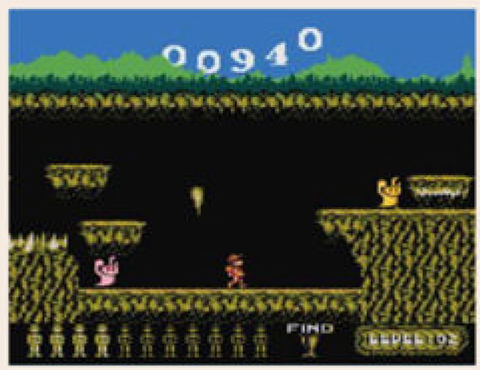
■ ***Zone X* looks** like a top-down dungeon crawler along the lines of the arcade classic *Gauntlet*, but any similarity is purely superficial. It offers a far more tactical challenge and in fact the main character is weaponless, so it's a case of avoiding hazards rather than blasting them. Your main objective is to collect plutonium deposits scattered around a mine and safely deposit them in lead-lined containers. A protective suit provides limited protection from radioactivity; meanwhile locked doors, crumbling walls and robotic guards require keys, spades and good reflexes. The game's main attraction lies in its finely balanced risk-and-reward gameplay.



» TWILIGHT WORLD

■ DEVELOPER: MATTHEW TRIMBY ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Underground worlds used** to be a source of great inspiration for developers; think *Monty Mole*, *Boulder Dash*, *Underwurlde* and so on. *Twilight World*, a demanding platformer, is another example. The action is split over 11 dungeons and although the game is visually consistent throughout, each stage mixes things up enough to hold the player's interest. There are well-thought-out level designs where you have to devise elaborate routes to overcome the game's many perils; but as a concession to its difficult nature, mishaps deplete an energy bar rather than costing a life. This tough gameplay is also offset by the satisfaction gained from making progress.



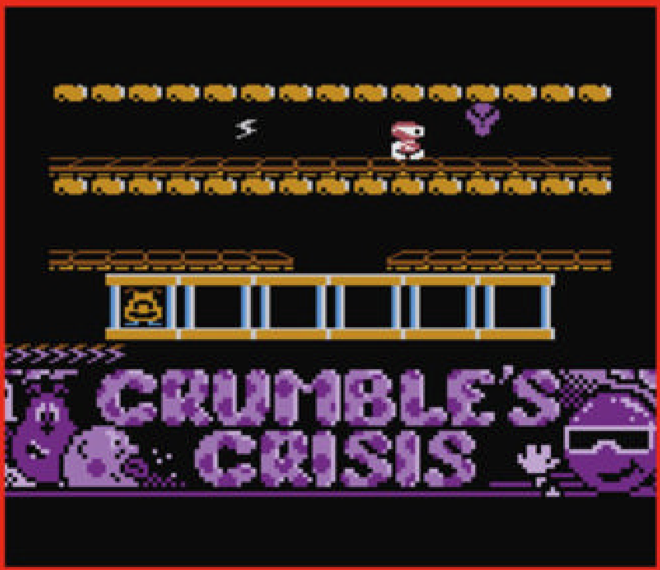
» CAVERNIA

■ DEVELOPER: IVAN MACKINTOSH ■ YEAR: 1990

■ ***Cavernia* proves just** how much a developer can squeeze out of a hardware platform that it's become really familiar with. It's the little things you notice, like the animated score dipping behind the parallax scrolling backgrounds and the way the main character's hat bobs up and down as he walks. This colourful platform affair is equally polished in respect of its gameplay, which leans towards console-type thrills and spills rather than pixel-perfect jumping. The aim is to avoid each stage's opponents and obstacles while collecting the objects needed to make that level's key appear. It's certainly a simple premise, but one that's well worked over 16 levels.

Minority Report

CRUMBLE'S CRISIS



» [Atari 8-bit] Navigating lightning storms past a creepy-looking skull while on the hunt for fuzzies.

■ DEVELOPER: IVAN MACKINTOSH ■ YEAR: 1987

■ Intergalactic zookeeper may be one of the stranger gaming roles you ever consider taking on, but that's exactly what's required of you in *Crumble's Crisis*. The suitably humorous crisis of the title revolves around the safe retrieval of 30 alien creatures, called fuzzies, which are running riot around the five sectors of a multiverse. You play Crumble, the keeper who forgot to lock the doors to the fuzzies' enclosures, and your goal is to make use of a jet-pack to round up the creatures and trap them in cages.

Your task would be far simpler if the fuzzies didn't keep teleporting from place to place, and didn't hide in the most dangerous locations where high-speed collisions with walls or ceilings and contact with resident ghosts and ghouls proves immediately fatal.

The gameplay is built around tight play areas which force the player to squeeze through small spaces while avoiding the game's many antagonists, deadly inanimate objects and surface areas. This can be frustrating, but as the collision detection is spot on, you find yourself persevering. There's also a mechanism used to heighten tension, where your limited time is decreased by lightning storms that occur if you spend too long in one of the game's many flick screens.

Graphically, *Crumble's Crisis* is nicely varied from room to room and sector to sector, which helps you keep your bearings in such a big game. Even if you initially fail to see some of those later stages, though, you'll certainly feel inclined to keep trying.

» JUMPMAN

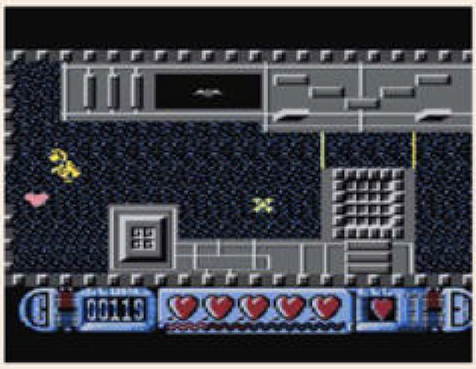
■ DEVELOPER: RANDY GLOVER ■ YEAR: 1983

■ Sometimes simple is best, and that's certainly the case with *Jumpman*. Climb the ladders and leap from platform to platform as you try to defuse all the bombs. There's a hilarious animated death scene too.

» ELECTRICIAN

■ DEVELOPER: DAVID BUNCH ■ YEAR: 1984

■ In this fine example of a game with a working-class hero, you play the role of an electrician manically trying to fix the wiring in a dilapidated building. Watch out for the alligators in the basement, though.



» HEARTACHE

■ DEVELOPER: ANDREW DICKINSON ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **It's rare to** come across a game that's truly original, but *Heartache* fits the bill. Interestingly, it's renamed *Heart Break* on the opening screen, but obviously nobody told the box artist. More importantly, however, its gameplay is genuinely unique. The game is set in the zero gravity of a deep-space laboratory, where your task is to make use of a gas cannon to blow a heart-shaped pod through a maze of corridors. If the pod touches the lab walls or an escaped experiment you lose a life, likewise if your air supply runs out. *Heartache* is worth playing for novelty value alone, but is also a pretty decent game.



» MOUSE TRAP

■ DEVELOPER: BRIAN JOBLING ■ YEAR: 1987

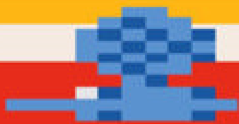
■ **As much of** a test of memory as skills and reactions, *Mouse Trap* sets you a series of single-screen platform-based puzzles that stop just short of being frustrating. The game's saving grace is the feeling of momentary triumph you get on reaching the exit of one of its 22 stages, before you see the fresh level you've reached and regain your sense of dread. The object is to get Marvin Mouse from one precarious ledge to the next and across chasms on floating platforms, while avoiding terrors like dragons, insects and witches. The graphics are basic and gameplay unforgiving, but once you start playing *Mouse Trap* you can't stop.

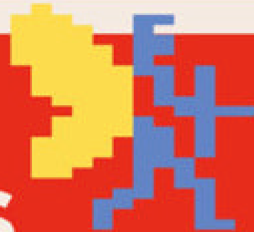


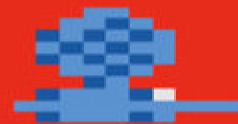
» POLAR PIERRE

■ DEVELOPER: RON ROSEN ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **The Atari 8-bits** have their fair share of platformers, but *Polar Pierre* does things a little differently. For one thing, you clear each level by raising rows of flags rather than collecting objects, which sounds simple but it's easy to miss flags. Of course, you seldom notice until you're halfway across the screen, meaning you've to backtrack to raise them. The other main difference is that the game has a two-player versus mode, which results in a hilarious free-for-all as you try to raise your flags before your competitor. Some nice visual effects, such as deadly lightning illuminating the screen, complement the frantic gameplay.







NIGHTMARES

■ DEVELOPER: DUNCAN STUART ■ YEAR: 1987

■ Though initially refused distribution before it had even been completed, this challenging and original shoot-'em-up did ultimately make it to shop shelves, allowing gamers to decide for themselves if it warranted its controversial reputation. Their answer was a resounding 'No', and soon after, attention shifted to admiring the game's huge detailed opponents and its frantic otherworldly firefights.

You have to wonder what on earth about the game gave distributors the jitters back in the Eighties. You play a nameless Faerie, charged with dispatching insects called Airflits while fighting off a horde of well-defined, but hardly scary, monstrosities in a series of tough side-scrolling levels.

In keeping with the fantasy setting, the laser guns and bombs associated with most shooters are absent, instead replaced by a magic bow and arrow and a limited supply of lightning. The key to progress lies in the player fulfilling their quota of Airflits before searching for an exit leading to a further 14 supernatural stages.

The game's mechanics keep you on your toes by dividing your attention between flocks of Airflits, which fly blindly into you if not shot, and far bigger ground-based beasties, which actively target you and require multiple hits to destroy. Contact with either has a negative impact on your energy.

Nightmares does provide an uphill challenge right from the outset, but once you get up to speed there's much to admire in the fight offered by your adversaries as you battle through the game's graphically varied stages.

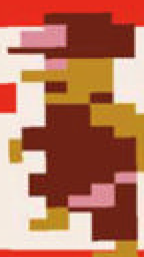


» [Atari 8-bit] Targeting a flock of Airflits while trying to avoid two larger ground-based monstrosities.

» NUCLEAR NICK

■ DEVELOPER: RON ROSEN ■ YEAR: 1986

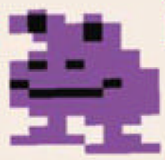
■ In this platformer where you collect objects while avoiding opponents, you can temporarily turn the tables by obtaining an energiser, like in *Pac-Man*. This works well.



» KNICKER-BOCKERS

■ DEVELOPER: KIRK CHANEY ■ YEAR: 1988

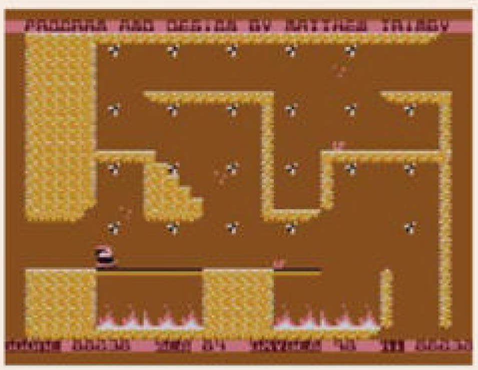
■ Your maddeningly addictive task is to close doors to make boxes while avoiding opponents. Beware: this seemingly cute game may become your new obsession.



» ENIGMATIX!

■ DEVELOPER: STEVEN A FIRTH ■ YEAR: 1993

■ You bounce a ball from platform to platform to reach an exit – made trickier by platforms dissolving and reversing your controls. It's against the clock, too.



» CRYSTAL RAIDER

■ DEVELOPER: MATTHEW TRIMBY ■ YEAR: 1986

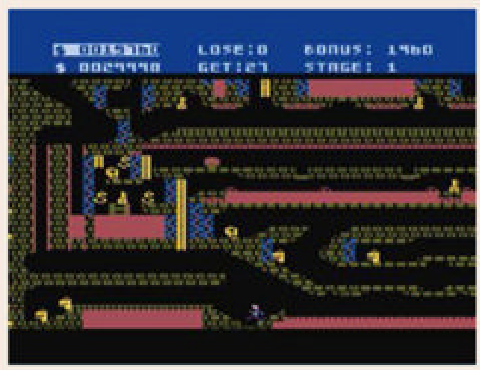
■ **You could describe** *Crystal Raider* as a tribute to *Bomb Jack*, but it's far from a straight copy. Your character's jumping certainly mirrors Jack's, and you have to collect items on each screen while avoiding dangers, but *Crystal Raider* is actually a very different game to its arcade counterpart. The main difference is that *Crystal Raider* is non-linear: you can leave rooms from various exits, and you can do so without collecting all the objects in a room. It also has additional elements, such as bridges floating over lava. Essentially, the game is more cerebral than the thick and fast fun provided by the Tehkan coin-op classic that inspired it.



» ROCKET REPAIRMAN

■ DEVELOPER: JOHN GUY ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Red Rat Software** was a stalwart supporter of the Atari home computers and while not all of its releases were stellar successes, it did publish quality efforts such as *Rocket Repairman*. The latter plays like that fairground game where you guide a metallic hoop around a twisted length of metal while trying not to let the two touch. The difference is that you're navigating a rocket-man around the tight confines of an underground mine looking for spaceship parts. Any contact with walls or mine inhabitants damages your spacesuit, and when you absorb 100 hit points or run out of air it's game over. The game's cartoon visuals nicely contrast this tense challenge.



» CAVERNS OF KHAFKA

■ DEVELOPER: ROBERT T BONIFACIO ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **Those who have** played the C64 *Caverns Of Khafka* might be slightly confused by the screenshot above. Well, simply put, the title released for the Atari 8-bits is a completely different game. While the Commodore version features big sprites and moves at a sedate and steady pace, its Atari counterpart sees a tiny main character zipping around a packed screen at a pace of knots. The scrolling caverns of the title belong to the Pharaoh Khafka and, as such, are stuffed full of treasure, but also elaborate traps and puzzles and appropriately themed deadly creatures. The Atari version's visuals may be functional, but they facilitate some frantic and absorbing puzzling.

My Computer

Bill's Gateway To Games

The Xbox comes to mind when you think of Microsoft and gaming, but the firm's involvement with games actually goes back to its beginnings. Marty Goldberg reveals what happened before it hit the big time with its Xbox brand

Bill's Gateway To Games

File Edit Search Help

For many people, Microsoft became synonymous with gaming because of its Xbox line of consoles. However, Microsoft's gaming history started far earlier.

Bill Gates, the multibillionaire co-founder of Microsoft, first crossed paths with the idea of mixing computer technology and games during his time at Lakeside. A posh all-boys private school in the Seattle, Washington area, it was the sort of environment that gave 14-year-old boys access to hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of computer equipment in 1968. In those days, most access to mainframe and mini-computers was via teletype terminals, large typewriter-like machines that fed in rolled reams of paper for input and output of messages to a computer. Lakeside had purchased a teletype machine along with time on a time-shared DEC PDP-10 mini-computer that the teletype connected to over the phone lines via a modem.

The handful of young students who were given access to this privileged machine all had to fight it out for their time on it, an expensive prospect since in those days every minute on a computer was billed. Unlike the by-the-minute chat phone lines advertised by scantily clad women several decades later, the only thing luring these young men into the costly endeavour was being able to control an exclusive and little-known world. A world christened by the sound of a machine-gun-like clickety clack of the teletype as you typed in your program and it spat back results at a blazing ten characters a second. It was during this time that Bill met future Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

The very first game Bill wrote, in a then very new language called BASIC, was a game: Tic-Tac-Toe. It was followed by several other games, all of the text variety, which proved to be the most popular use of computer time by Lakeside students. Enough so that the school soon used up its time much earlier than expected and the teletype was taken away.

Even though the time at Lakeside was over, the kids were still resourceful and sought out time on mainframes elsewhere.

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Help
Run...
Suspend
Shutdown...
MS-DOS Prompt
Outlook Express
Windows Explorer

Start

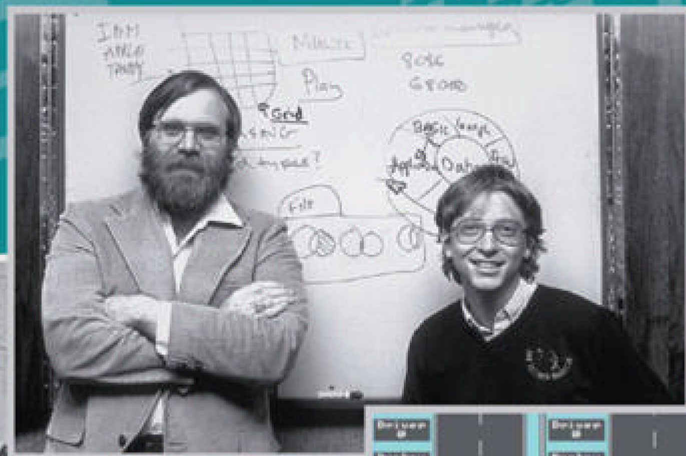


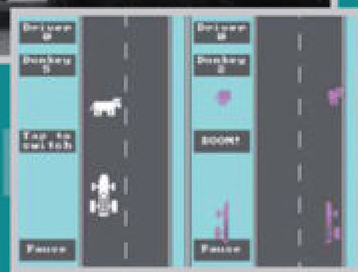
» An early image of Bill Gates from his days at Lakeside School.



» Bill Gates looks on fascinated, as a Lakeside teacher gets to work.

» Paul Allen and Bill Gates formed Microsoft together in 1975.





» [PC] Donkey was an early game from Bill Gates, and not really a good one.

Bill's Gateway To Games

File Edit Search Help

But the important seed had been sown, both for the future of Microsoft and for those of us who programmed games on home computers in the Seventies and Eighties: BASIC. Its ease of use and yet powerful support to program games and other applications was a powerful lesson learned by the young Bill Gates.

As the well-known story goes, Microsoft was born in 1975 when Bill Gates talked Ed Roberts into licensing a language for Roberts' newly launched personal computer, the Altair, and then hiring him and Paul Allen to support the language. That language was a version of BASIC, which became known as Microsoft BASIC.

As the personal computer market continued to grow, so did Microsoft – and its version of BASIC. In fact, Microsoft BASIC would be the standard BASIC for personal computers thanks to its licensing by the 'big three' at the time: Apple, Commodore and Tandy. It was Apple's version of Microsoft BASIC, a retooled and patched version called Applesoft BASIC, that became one of the most prolific versions. Many a game developer launched their career programming on the Apple II and its Applesoft BASIC, such as id Software's John Romero and John Carmack. By the 1980s, the BASIC code listings of games published in computer magazines led to legions of programmers dutifully typing in the code to play the very same game on their own computers… followed by at least half yelling curses at the screen when they mistyped one of the lengthy ubiquitous DATA statements! All this was thanks to Microsoft, and its push of its BASIC into the industry.

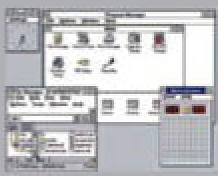
The cottage industry of games software for personal computers grew in the late Seventies and early Eighties, with self-publishers and more legit publishing companies getting in on the act. It was an act that Microsoft didn't want to miss either and it published its first commercial game, *Microsoft Adventure*, in 1979 for the Apple II and TRS-80. The first home computer version of *Colossal Cave Adventure*, a game more successfully released as *Zork* by Infocom several years later, it truly launched Microsoft's long career in games. It also introduced something else never before seen: production values. Still being largely dominated by hobbyists, the games being distributed via audio cassette at the time were usually thrown into a baggie with a crudely typed instruction sheet. Maybe it was taking cues from Apple's production values, or the popularity of the consumer videogame industry, but Bill and company decided to go all out and produce a beautifully illustrated box and professional packaging. Oh, and even though barely anyone owned floppy disk drives for their computers, they pushed the envelope and released the game on 5¼" floppies.

Though still primarily a languages and applications company, Microsoft continued to release games like *Microsoft Decathlon*… and *Donkey*. Never heard of *Donkey*? Bill Gates probably wishes you hadn't either. One of his early master strokes in the very early Eighties was getting IBM to license his yet to be created operating system, PC-DOS. Unfortunately, this action also resulted in a game called *Donkey* being provided with every IBM computer. The very first game on a PC, it consists of a top-down view of a car racing down a road that needs to dodge… donkeys. Created to show off the capabilities of Microsoft's BASIC to IBM, it was written by none other than Bill Gates himself (along with Microsoft programmer Neil Konzen). In game lore, it rivals Atari's *ET* as a horrible game. ▶

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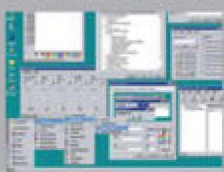
Key Windows

The best of Microsoft's operating systems



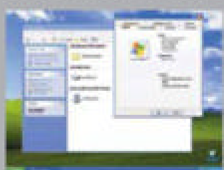
WINDOWS 3.1

■ The version that finally made PC users consider a GUI over the old DOS command prompt. Built on top of DOS, it gave adopters the best of both worlds. Oh, and it introduced the Windows classic game *Minesweeper*.



WINDOWS 95

■ The first version of Windows to get close to the then current Macintosh GUI experience, Windows 95 also introduced the DirectX framework to put the final nail in the coffin for DOS as a gaming platform.



WINDOWS XP

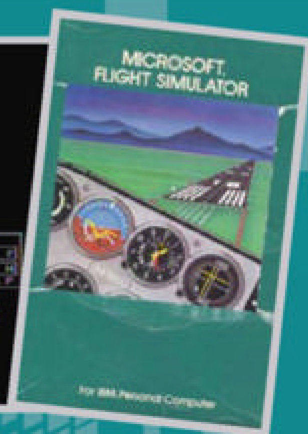
■ After a series of flops (Windows ME anyone?) and incremental updates, this version was to become the gold standard PC OS and gaming platform. The Vista debacle caused XP to live far beyond its intended life.



» The IMSAI 8080 was a hobbyist computer that was first released in December 1975.

» *Microsoft Flight Simulator* has turned into a massively popular series.





Bill's Gateway To Games

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▶ As the Macintosh team's Andy Hertzfeld recalls on www.folklore.org:

"Steve Jobs allowed the Mac team to buy an early [IBM PC] to dissect and evaluate… It came with some games written in BASIC that were especially embarrassing. The most embarrassing game was a low-res graphics driving game called *Donkey*. Since the game was written in BASIC, you could list it out and see how it was written. We were surprised to see that the comments at the top of the game proudly proclaimed the authors: Bill Gates and Neil Konzen. Neil was a bright teenage hacker who I knew from his work on the Apple II (who would later become Microsoft's technical lead on the Mac project), but we were amazed that such a thoroughly bad game could be co-authored by Microsoft's co-founder, and that he would actually want to take credit for it in the comments."

That was quickly made up for, though, when Microsoft licensed a flight simulator from a firm called subLOGIC and released it as *Microsoft Flight Simulator 1.0* for the IBM-PC in 1982. It's now the longest-running computer game franchise in existence, and Microsoft's oldest still-in-development product.



Microsoft's next most significant contribution to computer gaming came thanks to the efforts of its head of Far East Operations, Kazuhiko Nishi. Better known as Kay Nishi, he had originally co-founded a Japanese publishing company called ASCII which published a computer magazine by the same name. When Bill Gates came to Kay to head Microsoft's Far East expansion, the two formed Microsoft's first overseas sales office, ASCII Microsoft.

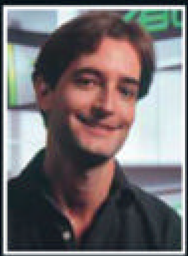
In 1983, the personal computer industry was looking at a pending shift from 8-bit to 16-bit machines. Companies like Apple, Hewlett-Packard and SAGE were all releasing higher-end Motorola 68000-based computers that year and it was only a matter of time before mid-level and lower-end computers followed suit (which Sinclair did the following year with the release of the QL). Microsoft and Kay felt the disparate 8 bit-computer market was ripe for a standard, based around Microsoft's BASIC of course. It just so happened that Kay Nishi had just finished advising on a new 8-bit computer design for the Plainsville, New York-based company Spectravideo.

It was a chance encounter that led to Kay Nishi's role in Spectravideo's computer, which was being shown off at the Chicago Consumer Electronics Show in June 1983. Kay had already helped design Radio Shack's ground-breaking TRS-80 Model 100 portable computer, and Spectravideo executives reckoned that not only could Kay help them, but that Spectravideo could also help Microsoft. "Our pitch to Microsoft is that we believe its name is not well known in the computer market and that we could help change that," revealed Harry Fox, Spectravideo president at the time.

The resulting computer was the Spectravideo SV-328, a machine made from essentially off-the-shelf parts: a Z80 microprocessor, a TMS9918 graphics chip, AY-3-8910 sound chip, 64K RAM and, most importantly, Microsoft's Extended BASIC. Kay was so excited about the possibilities of the computer that he felt it had the perfect specs to base their new standard on, which became known as the Microsoft Extended Standard, or ▶

The Big Interview

Ed Fries looks back at his early Microsoft career



> Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school?
I grew up in Bellevue, WA, a suburb of Seattle and stayed there through the end of high school. I went to a small college in New Mexico called New Mexico Tech and then moved back to Seattle to work for Microsoft when I graduated.

> What are your earliest memories of technology?
My dad was an electrical engineer working for Boeing and my mom was a software engineer working for Digital Equipment Corporation, so between them they were always bringing home 'high tech' stuff for me to play with.

> By play with, did that include taking things apart to see how they worked?
My dad put himself through college as a TV repairman so we grew up around lots of electronic components and were always soldering them together to make random stuff. I remember building a 'bomb' in a coffee can and challenging my friends to 'disarm' it. It had a buzzer that would go off if they cut the wrong wire or triggered the light sensor or tilt sensor.

> Were there any favourite games as well?
Probably the earliest videogame I remember playing was *Lunar Lander* on a programmable calculator. I moved on to things like the original *Adventure* and *Zork* on printing terminals. The first personal computer games I played were on the TRS-80, Apple II and Atari 800.

> What was your career pre-Microsoft?
Santa brought me an Atari 800 around Christmas 1980 and I taught myself to program it, first in BASIC and then when that wasn't fast enough, assembly language. I wrote clones of games I saw in the arcade. *Space War*, *Frogger*. Someone was starting a game company called Romox and saw my *Frogger* clone (called *Froggie*)… They offered me a job writing games for them and suddenly I was in the game business. Over the next couple years I wrote three games while going to school – *Princess and Frog* (*Froggie* reworked so we wouldn't be sued), *Anteater* and *Sea Chase* – but the entire industry melted down around 1984 and Romox went out of business. By then I was in college working on my computer science degree.

> Did that experience influence you at all on how you guys wanted to approach/support game development and third parties during the Xbox years?
I think it's important for publishers to have empathy toward the developers they work with so yeah, it's an advantage to have worked on both sides of the industry. For me, though, my strategy building the games group was more about what kinds of games I enjoyed and what designers I had respect for. We worked with Chris Roberts, Chris Taylor, Peter Molyneux, the Stamper brothers, Bungie, (tried to buy Westwood, tried to buy Blizzard twice) because those were people who, in my mind, made great games.

> When did you join Microsoft and why?
I would come back from New Mexico during the summers of college and look for work. Between my junior and senior years I applied to Microsoft (which was pretty small back then) and was offered an internship. They liked the job I did that summer and offered me a full-time job when I graduated the next year. I accepted and after I graduated they added me to the Excel team as one of seven programmers making the first version of Excel for Windows.

> Did you have an interest in getting back into game development then?.
I spent almost five years on Excel and they kept giving me more responsibility, first leading a small team and then acting as lead programmer for the whole project. Then my boss switched to Word and asked me to come over as development manager running the whole 60-person development team. I did that for another almost five years before they wanted me to move up into a business/management job. They wanted me to go run something in Office like PowerPoint, but I found out the games group needed a business unit manager and said I wanted that job instead. They told me I was crazy to give up an important job in Office to go work on something "no one cares about" but they let me do it anyway.



» An early example of a teleprinter that Bill Gates would have used back in his school days.

» There were lots of MSX variants. This is Sony's HitBit-10-P model.





» A manual for Spectravideo's SV-328. It would later become the standard for the MSX.

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Bill's Gateway To Games

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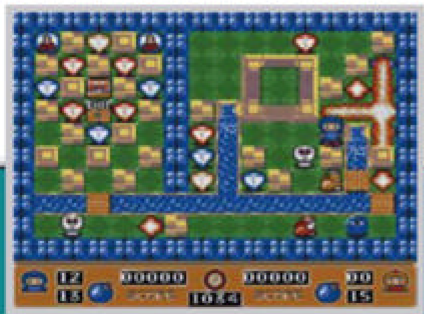
▶ MSX, after the special Extended BASIC used as the lynchpin. It's no mistake that the proposed standard was also similar in many ways to two consoles, one well established and another up-and-coming one: Coleco's Colecovision and Sega's SG-1000 respectively. These two consoles were providing proof of concept for just how great a gaming platform the MSX standard could be, and the SV-328 computer was poised to prove what a powerful computer platform it already was.

The idea was to promote the MSX as a standard in the computer industry, something manufacturers could rally around and release their own versions of competing hardware with personal touches. In a move that foreshadowed the 3DO game console standard promoted by Trip Hawkins a decade later, MSX became a popular standard outside the US during the latter half of the Eighties. Sony, Toshiba, Goldstar, Philips and even Spectravideo all built MSX-standard computers, and the MSX standard itself continued to evolve with the MSX2 and 2+ standards. Most importantly, though, some very classic game franchises got their start on the platform, such as *Bomberman*, *Eggerland* and *Metal Gear*.

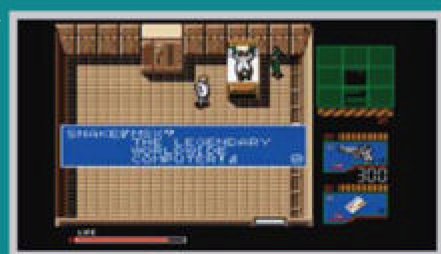
Microsoft's 1995 contribution of DirectX, in combination with the rise of 3D graphics accelerator cards for Windows-based computers, led to the rise of Windows-based machines as a powerful platform for computer gaming. MS-DOS machines had already been popular for PC gaming, and it was proving a stubborn platform to overturn for Microsoft. DOS provided direct access to all the system's hardware, while its new Win95 in its initial release did not. Three Microsoft developers, Craig Eisler, Alex St John and Eric Engstrom, came up with a solution called Windows Games SDK – later renamed to Direct X.

With each revision, combined with the powerful growth of the 'WinTel' Windows/Intel-based platform, Microsoft changed the face of personal computer-based gaming forever. A new line of its own most famous titles were also released due to the continually evolving technology of DirectX, such as *Age Of Empires*, *Crimson Skies*, *Links* and many more.

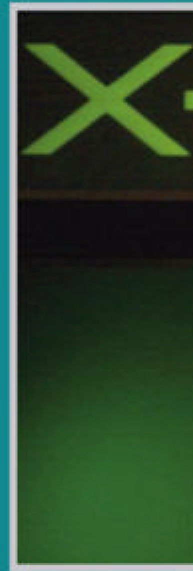
Not long after Windows 95 and DirectX, Microsoft released its answer for the growing mobile and embedded systems market. Windows CE was designed for platforms with a compact design – namely minimal storage and memory. Sounds like a game console, doesn't it? Well, Sega thought so and worked with Microsoft for two years developing a specially tailored version of Windows CE for the Sega Dreamcast. The Dreamcast was Sega's pre-emptive strike into the sixth generation of videogame consoles after losing major ground with its fifth-gen Saturn. Trounced by Sony's PlayStation and Nintendo's N64, Sega was looking to recapture the lost glory of its Genesis/Mega Drive years by being the first to the market with a '128-bit graphics machine'. The use of Windows CE brought with it DirectX, and the possibility of porting Windows games to the Dreamcast. The problem was, it was a possibility nobody showed up to. The Dreamcast loads its OS off disc; each game disc to be precise. Developers had the ability to either use Microsoft's special CE or Sega's own developed OS. Because of issues developers claimed they had porting DirectX games to the Dreamcast version of CE, only about 50 titles out of the library of about 692 licensed games



» [MSX] *Bombmerman* is another popular franchise that was available on the MSX.



» [MSX] *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* was an exceptionally popular game on the MSX.



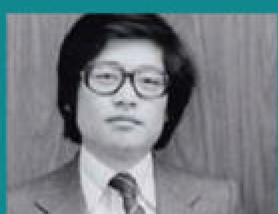
The Key People Of Microsoft

Your guide to the staff that helped make Microsoft a success



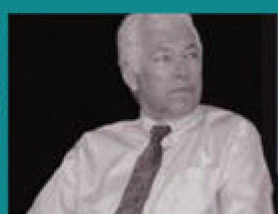
BILL GATES

■ The co-founder of Microsoft, the master businessman and multibillionaire helped create and plan out the platforms. Whether you're a programmer or player, you owe him a debt of gratitude.



KAY NISHI

■ The man behind the MSX standard, his efforts provided many with hours of gaming fun in the mid through late Eighties. A tech mogul in his own right, Kay continues to promote his beloved MSX to this day.



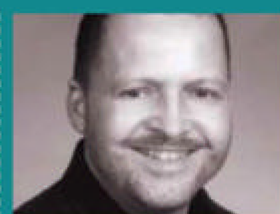
BRUCE ARTWICK

■ The founder of subLOGIC, Bruce is better known as the man behind *Flight Simulator*. He went on to form the Bruce Artwick Organization, an advanced flight sim company that was eventually bought out by Microsoft.



ALEX ST JOHN

■ The co-creator of DirectX, he also founded WildTangent. The latter was a successful game network and simultaneously the bane of many Windows users as it sucked up valuable system resources.



CRAIG EISLER

■ Another co-creator of DirectX, Craig is currently the general manager for another pioneering Microsoft gaming project: Xbox Live. He also previously headed the team behind the motion-sensing Microsoft Kinect.

Start







Bill's Gateway To Games

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used WinCE. Most notable were two of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* games, two *Tomb Raiders* and a *Resident Evil*.

The poor adoption of CE as a gaming platform OS didn't really bother Microsoft, however. Why? It already had its own entry into the console market underway thanks to several engineers from the DirectX team. In 1998, Otto Berkes, Kevin Bachus, Seamus Blackley and Ted Hase disassembled several Dell laptop computers in the hope of creating a prototype of an idea they had: a 'Direct-X box' game console. Something that would leverage PC architecture and Microsoft's software from the ground up; hardware to OS, and OS to library support. Sony had already been at work on its follow-up to the PlayStation, and its position as the leader of the console industry meant that developers were looking to move to the next expected cash cow over any DirectX platform. If Microsoft could just prove the superiority of its proposed approach, it might not only lure developers back to the fold but possibly once and for all give Microsoft a decisive foothold in games.

The last key to the DirectX team's plan was getting Ed Fries on board, the leader of Microsoft's game publishing division at the time. Primarily responsible for Microsoft's movement into the leading PC game publisher position, Fries saw the possibilities. It simply made sense to develop a platform that Microsoft could control from start to finish, including the games that ran on it.

After approval from Microsoft's management, the two teams set about moving forward in the development of the console. Curiously, while it would of course support DirectX, the new console would not be running Microsoft's CE operating system. Instead, a custom OS based on its standard Win32 API was created. Obviously it would give the console the advantage of jettisoning non-needed code and windowing support, but it was still an interesting choice given Microsoft's then PR train promoting the adoption of CE.

Regardless, after a name shortening to Xbox and a presentation by Bill Gates at the 2000 Game Developers Conference, the industry knew that the big three was about to become the big four. That is if it had any decent titles at launch. It just so happens that Ed Fries provided an iconic launch title… by mistake.

Under Fries, Microsoft had acquired game studio Bungie and its in-development title *Halo: Combat Evolved*. A decidedly 'PC-style' shooter, it didn't have its fans at Microsoft. Some worried it was too unlike the then popular but standard console game fare. Ed shielded the Bungee team from such criticisms, however, and they continued to finish what would become a landmark title. At its release alongside the launch of the Xbox on 15 November 2001, *Halo* stood out against the other offerings on the market. And more so than any other launch title, it seemed to be tailor-made for the Xbox's message, right down to the similar greenish glowing colours of the console – even if it was by accident.

Within five months *Halo* had sold one million copies, and just over another year later another two million were sold. It had not just legitimised Microsoft's arrival as a major player in the game console industry, it had created a gaming phenomenon.

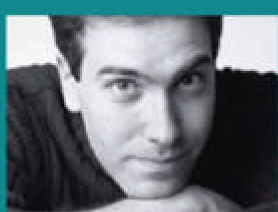
Going head to head with Sony's PlayStation and Nintendo's GameCube, the Xbox held its own, helped by a growing library of strong titles such as *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* series and Konami's breakout *Dance Dance Revolution* games. Important advancements like the Xbox Live online service – which *Halo 2* helped to popularise – made sure the console stayed ahead of the game.

By the release of the Xbox 360 in 2005, Microsoft had entered the next generation of consoles as an equal and no longer a questionable also-ran. It's been a long journey from the days of a 14-year-old coding text-based games at an exclusive prep school in Seattle, Washington, but Microsoft is now at the top of its game.



ERIC ENGSTROM

■ The last of the three that can take credit for inventing DirectX, after leaving Microsoft for a time he returned and is currently the general manager of Microsoft's mobile efforts. That's right, Bing Mobile is all Eric.



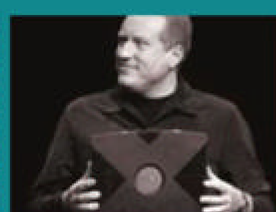
KEVIN BACHUS

■ A DirectX team member, Kevin is better known as one of the three co-founders of the Xbox. He's currently the senior vice-president of entertainment and games strategy for the restaurant chain Dave & Busters.



TED HASE

■ Also from the DirectX team, Ted is an Xbox co-founder. He moved on to become director of Windows gaming & entertainment evangelism and is now the VP of R&D in a different kind of gaming field: gambling and casinos.



SEAMUS BLACKLEY

■ Xbox co-founder and former DirectX team member, Seamus went on to represent game dev talent at the Creative Artists Agency. More recently he formed game developing group Innovative Leisure with Atari alumni.



ED FRIES

■ Former head of Microsoft's game publishing division, Ed led the game publishing efforts for the Xbox. This included the acquisition of Bungie Studios, which provided the important launch title *Halo*, and Rare.

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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO DOCTOR WHO

This year Doctor Who celebrates its landmark 50th anniversary. In celebration we take a look back at every videogame the Doctor has appeared in and hear from some of the people behind them

Doctor Who: The First Adventure [1983]

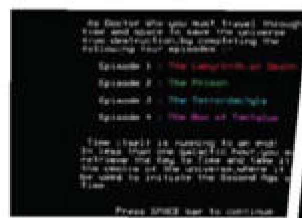
■ **FORMAT:** BBC MICRO

You take control of the Fifth Doctor (Peter Davison) on his way to a showdown with the Black Guardian, a recurring villain of the Davison era. Time itself is running to an end; you must collect pieces of a time key and take them to the centre of the universe to create 'the second age of time'.

The game consists of just four episodes, with each one being a *Doctor Who*-themed variation of then popular arcade games such as *Pac-Man*, *Frogger*, *Space Invaders* and *Battleship*. Players have a time limit of just an hour to complete all four episodes before the game is lost and they have to start over.

While this was the very first official *Doctor Who* game, it had been beaten to the market by the similarly titled *Doctor Who Adventure*, an unofficial game that doesn't make our feature.









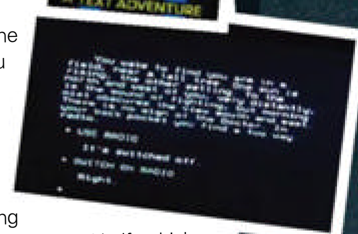
Doctor Who And The Warlord [1985]

■ **FORMAT:** BBC MICRO



The second official videogame was thankfully much more original: a text-based adventure game that features an original story created by then producer of the TV series, Graham Williams. Starring an unspecified Doctor (possibly the Sixth Doctor Colin Baker), the game takes place in two halves, with you in the role of the companion.

In the first part, after being separated from the Doctor on a strange planet, it's your task to track down the elusive Time Lord while solving puzzles and completing tasks along the way. Collecting objects in this part of the game unlocks the second half, which sees you reunited with the Doctor as the TARDIS takes you to the Battle of Waterloo, where you will need to defeat the malignant Warlord.



This title was much deeper than the previous game, with the format of a text adventure much more suiting the time-travelling nature of the TV series.

***Special thanks to Steven Benway for his help with this article.**

Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror [1985]

■ **FORMAT:** **BBC MICRO, C64, AMSTRAD CPC**

Later in the year that *Doctor Who And The Warlord* was released, *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror* hit the BBC Micro, with the C64 and Amstrad versions following in 1986. As usual, you take control of the Doctor (recognisably Colin Baker's version with his snazzy multicoloured coat) as he tries to thwart the plans of a renegade Time Lord called the Master. The Master has obtained a TIRU, a device which has the ability to rearrange time itself. Hiding within the location of a compound used in the TIRU – the 'Mines Of Terror' of the title – the Time Lords send the Doctor to thwart the Master's plans and destroy the TIRU.

The game takes the form of a platformer with the Doctor being followed by his latest robot companion, a robotic cat name Splinx. Rather surprisingly for a *Doctor Who* game, the player can die in numerous graphic ways, such as lack of oxygen, spikes and robot attacks, and even forced regeneration.

The level-patrolling robots are very similar to Daleks but as the rights for the Daleks are not fully owned by the BBC, the game instead calls them the Controlllers.

Too large to fit into the standard memory of the BBC Micro, *Mines Of Terror* came with its own ROM chip which had to be installed for the game to run, along with main disk. This also caused problems for the unreleased (but heavily previewed and advertised) ZX Spectrum version, which would have required an add-on cartridge.







Favourite Doctor Who
GEOFF CRAMMOND
VETERAN PROGRAMMER

■ I find them all slightly irritating, to be honest. That's not to say I haven't watched it a lot.

Favourite Doctor Who
SEAN MILLARD
SUMO DIGITAL

■ Davros, for the smiles he gives me due to his striking similarities with Carl Cavers, Sumo MD. I grew up with Tom Baker as the Doctor, so he's my favourite. Matt Smith is great too, though.

Gary Partis [Developer of Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror on BBC Micro]



***Mines Of Terror* was first created as a sequel to the popular game *Castle Quest*. Was it easy to adapt into a *Doctor Who* game or were there problems?**

Problems!? Problems give engineers the reason to exist! The original game design was an arcade adventure; so apart from graphical alterations, nothing really changed… Some of the puzzles subsequent to the licence being granted were Dr Who orientated, but I guess the game could have been engineered to be based on any such sci-fi type licence.

Was it a difficult project to work on?

Not at all! In fact, it was one of the easiest. As this game was the first I worked upon where there were others involved (in the early 1980s, most games were one-man-design-and-developed), all graphics and puzzles were designed by a number of us.

With the BBC Micro version having to come bundled with its own ROM chip, did this present any problems with the production?

No personal issues, other than deciding what to place into ROM and what was to be loaded from tape/disk. In the end, I decided to place the map layout and much of the graphics into ROM. The only problem with this was that parts of the map changed when certain puzzles were completed. Special-case map-handling code was used to take care of this.

Due to the BBC only having part ownership of the Daleks, was it difficult to create a new enemy to face the Doctor?

Aha – thus the 'Controllers'. As the rights to Daleks are owned by BBC and Terry Nation [now his estate], we had to come up with something which did not infringe copyright laws. The Controllers were a compromise. However, they do resemble Daleks slightly!

©NASA





Dalek Attack [1992]

FORMAT: PC, C64, AMIGA, ZX SPECTRUM

After the success of *Mines Of Terror*, fans thought the BBC would have produced more games based on the series, but sadly it wasn't meant to be. Following the cancellation of the TV series in 1989 and with the stories only continuing in novels, the videogames dried up. The final two games based on the classic series were released in the Nineties. Arriving in 1992 on the PC, Amiga and C64, *Dalek Attack* was a side-scrolling action game that saw the Doctor forget his non-violent ways and fight the Daleks head on.

It features different combinations of Doctors and companions depending on which version you play (usually choosing between the Fourth, Fifth and Seventh), although the later Spectrum version only has Sylvester McCoy's Seventh Doctor to control. A nice feature of the game is that a second player may join in as either the Doctor's companion Ace or a UNIT soldier (only Ace in the Spectrum version); K-9 also makes a welcome appearance. The game begins in the sewers of a destroyed London with the Doctor flying along on a hoverboard before travelling to various cities battling Daleks and Robomen. Then it's a trip to the Daleks' home world Skaro for a final battle with their creator, Davros.

On the PC and Amiga versions, there is a secret room behind some blocks. The room gives some of the programming credits for each game, in particular the graphics and music. The credits were hidden in this way due to the BBC not wanting individual credits for the game development team to be included in it. Perhaps surprisingly, the PC version, which has the most sophisticated graphics, and the ZX Spectrum version, the most basic version, were both coded by the same person. This was largely due to the similarities between Z80 and 8086 assembly language.

The major problem fans had with the game was the sudden change of the Doctor's non-violent ways, from pacifist to gunning down every Dalek in sight, in order to create a generic shooter. Among the recognisable Daleks, there are variations from the 1960s movies and the special weapons Dalek from the TV episode 'Remembrance of the Daleks'. Interestingly, it features some special Daleks that had only been seen in the TV Century 21 comic strips of the Sixties and the game has the distinction of being the last licensed title to be released on the ZX Spectrum. In fact, Alternative Software only released it due to popular demand, as the Spectrum was no longer seen as a commercially viable platform by 1993.

Favourite Doctor Who

ROLAND PERRY
EX-AMSTRAD

■ The first one. I remember when the first episode was shown – long before VCRs or other ways to view again. I think they, very unusually, repeated the first episode a week later, for those people who missed it.

Roger Hulley (Producer of Dalek Attack)



With the Doctor being against violence, why choose an action side-scroller?
There had already been a previous adventure game, so we decided that we should do something different, and we decided an all-out action game in which the Daleks would actually shoot and exterminate you. When watching the TV series as a child, it was always exciting when the Daleks cried "Exterminate!" and fired their guns (and the unfortunate target became a black and white 'negative'), so we wanted to get this excitement in the game.

Where did the idea and story for the game come from?
As Dr Who fans we had wanted to do a game for some time, but as it had been off screen for several years we needed to have a good selling point and that's when we realised that the 30th anniversary was soon to come up.

When storyboarding the game, we opted for a Dalek invasion of Earth, but we thought it would be more exciting if we had more locations, not just the UK as was the case in the series. So we went for London to start (we even got the correct street name) and then you went to Paris, New York and Tokyo.

We also wanted to incorporate other Dalek 'baddies' as well, so we had the 'flying' Daleks, The Emperor Dalek (as featured in the TV21 comic) and Elite Battle Daleks (we got the idea for these from a drawing in a book on Daleks at the time).

We also had end-of-level Guardians where the programmers' imaginations were left to run riot.

Which was your favourite version?
My favourite version was on the Amiga. The game was not easy to create, as the development team will no doubt testify, but it was a lot of fun.



Destiny Of The Doctors [1997]

FORMAT: PC

The final game based around the classic series of *Dr Who* was released in 1997 for the PC. It revolves around the devious Master using a newly found psychic power source to take the first seven incarnations of the Doctor out of time and space in order to eradicate all history of the Doctor from time. You take on the role of the Graak, a psychic created by the Doctor who pledges to stop the Master no matter the cost. Every incarnation has a level based around them and features many challenges for the player to overcome in order to save that version of the Doctor.

The game features many of the Doctors' old enemies, from Ice Warriors to Zygons, and each level presents a brand new challenge to complete. Also, to the game's credit, all the surviving actors returned to the series to voice their Doctors. Unknown voice actors had to be used for the first two Doctors and even though Jon Pertwee agreed to provide his voice to the game, he passed away in 1996 before it could be completed. An agreement was reached with his widow that the Third Doctor would be represented using audio clips from the TV show. It is also sadly the final appearance of Anthony Ainley's Master before his unfortunate death in 2004.

Even though the title found critical acclaim from many magazines, it was to be the final *Dr Who* game until 2008.

Top Trumps: Doctor Who [2008]

■ FORMAT: PS2, PC, NINTENDO WII & DS

The first videogame to be released since the TV show triumphantly returned in 2005, *Doctor Who Top Trumps* wasn't exactly the game fans craved. Like the regular Top Trumps games, players receive a deck of cards, with each card featuring a character or event from the *Doctor Who* universe along with statistics which define its strengths and weaknesses. The player with the higher number wins that round and play continues until one player loses all of their cards.

The cards feature characters and events from series one to three of the new show, presented in the animation style of stories *The Infinite Quest* and *Scream Of The Shalka*, which helps add a degree of originality to the presentation. It's the only videogame to feature Christopher Eccleston and David Tennant's Doctors – as well as their companions, beginning with Rose Tyler, right up to then current companion Martha Jones.



Favourite Doctor Who

GARY BRACEY
EX-OCEAN SOFTWARE

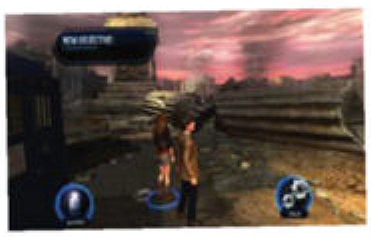
■ William Hartnell – because I'm old. And also because one's first Doctor Who is generally your favourite (the reason why so many people quote Sean Connery as the 'best Bond').

Doctor Who: The Adventure Games [2010]

■ FORMAT: PC

Brilliantly penned by Phil Ford, who has written for both *Doctor Who* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, the *Adventure Games* were released to coincide with Matt Smith's first series as the Doctor. Series producer Piers Wenger claimed, "There aren't 13 episodes of *Doctor Who* this year, there are 17 – four of which are interactive. Everything you see and experience is part of the *Doctor Who* universe."

All the episodes were free to download and featured stunning voice work from the main stars: the Doctor and Amy in series one, while Amy's husband Rory joined the TARDIS team for series 2. Although the episodes featured the return of old enemies like the Vashta Neradam Rutans and Sontarans, the BBC eventually shelved the games in favour of global console releases.



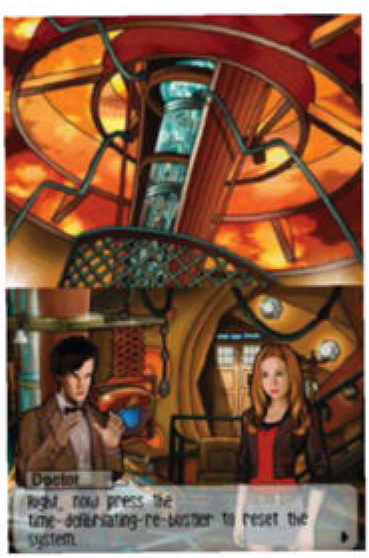
Doctor Who: Return To Earth [2010]

■ FORMAT: NINTENDO WII

The Doctor and Amy arrive on the Lucy Gray, the first starship to return to Earth after the solar storms of the 26th Century. However, on the ship are both Daleks and Cybermen, who are after the dangerous Time Axis – naturally, you need to stop them obtaining it.

Once again Matt Smith and Karen Gillan provide voices for their popular characters and help to bring an otherwise bland game to life. Smith, as always, gives his all to voicing the Doctor, but it's not enough to stop *Return To Earth* from being an extremely tepid third-person adventure. There's plenty to do in the game, but it's heavily geared towards younger players, who will no doubt be put off by the game's stiff difficulty. Needless to say it was universally panned by critics and marks a low point for the series.





Doctor Who: Evacuation Earth [2010]

■ FORMAT: NINTENDO DS

Announced back in 2010, it was reported that Nintendo had signed a contract worth £10 million to bring the adventures of Doctor to the Nintendo DS and Wii consoles. They would both be written by *Doctor Who* writer Oli Smith and star Matt Smith as the Doctor and Karen Gillan as Amy Pond. The first of these to be released was the DS game *Evacuation Earth*, in which The Doctor has to help humans as they attempt to evacuate the Earth, while the Daleks intervene and attempt to force the Doctor to help them instead. It had the potential to be a solid puzzle adventure game, but developer Asylum Entertainment dropped the ball, delivering an average offering with uninspiring gameplay and overly simple puzzles. Younger children will certainly enjoy it, but others should steer well clear.

©NASA

Sean Millard

[Creative director on the Doctor Who Adventure Games]



Why did you choose an episodic nature for your games?
This was a decision made by the BBC that allowed us to stagger releases in while feeding into the accepted nature of the *Doctor Who* format. It worked well from a scriptwriting point of view, so the narrative (which was high on the BBC's list of priorities) could follow a similar structure and the bite-sized adventuring would be more appealing to the massive 8-80 demographic. The delivery method of the games was innovative in lots of ways, but providing something of that quality for free (with no ads or monetisation) was something only the BBC could do – it was exciting to be a part of the process that defined what quality could be expected of a 'freebie'.

How did Charles Cecil help out?
Charles was invaluable bringing his enormous amount of adventure gaming expertise to the title and in the relationship between the BBC and Sumo. He was the trusted representative of the BBC's expectations and the voice of reason regarding the realities of development schedules. He was an essential go-between as well as the design director of the games. He and I worked very closely on the narrative, the puzzles, the action and the progress.

How faithfully did you have to stick to elements of the TV series?
Extraordinarily so! The *Doctor Who* fan base is rabid with a keen eye for attention to detail – not just for the current Doctors but for the last 50 years of *Doctor Who*. You can't mess with that level of expectation, knowledge and vocalisation – we would have been shot down quickly if we had. The fans are what make *Doctor Who* such an exciting and perennial brand, so sticking faithfully to the TV series and the wider Who-niverse was essential. Lots of learning was needed to be done by everyone involved to make sure we didn't mess up!

What's the best episode and why?
My personal favourite is 'Shadows of the Vashta Nerada' – the underwater episode. I just love the enemies and the tension; it looked great and to me it felt the most like a TV episode – the possessed diver suits were a nice twist on the spacesuits from the 'Silence in the Library'. I think a lot of people like the Cyberman adventure and the Dalek one was popular too, but for me, monster sharks and Vashta Nerada made the most fun.

Doctor Who: The Mazes Of Time [2010]

■ FORMAT: iOS

Again written by Oli Smith, this iOS game finds both the Doctor and Amy arriving on a spaceship in distress. The Doctor must travel through time and space to prevent the Daleks, Cybermen and Silurians from gaining a device called the Time Engine. The game is played from a third-person perspective and has you controlling Amy and the Doctor; each has different abilities that are used to solve specific puzzles. Critics praised the game for its clever puzzles and intuitive controls. Two updates were released, the first revolving around Christmas and featuring the Autons, the other featuring the deadly Weeping Angels.

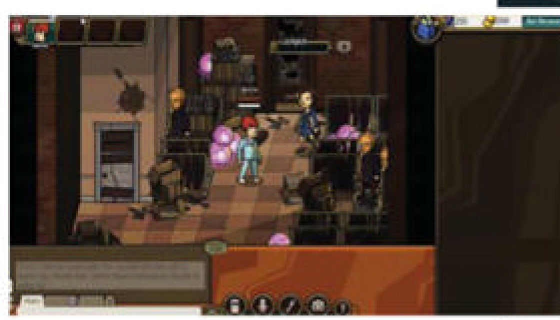


Doctor Who: Worlds In Time [2012]

■ FORMAT: PC

A cutesy open-world MMO is probably the last genre you would find explored by a *Doctor Who* game, but 2012's *Worlds In Time* did precisely that. The first *Doctor Who* game created by an American company, it sees you take control of your created character (from a variety of aliens and humans) to follow in the footsteps of the Doctor, solving various puzzles and quests in a multiplayer environment. Completing an adventure or quest unlocks the next story arc and helps to progress the story.

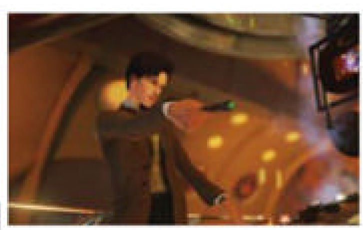
New planets become available after the successful completion of several adventures. In reward for completing mini-games and adventures, you gain shards which are used to unlock features and even more challenges. Although free to play, many of the things or items needed to progress in gameplay craftily require chronons – this in-game currency regenerates at the rate of one every half-hour until the limit of 50 is reached.



Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock [2012]

■ FORMAT: PC, PS3, PS VITA

Arguably the most popular companion since the series returned back in 2005 is River Song, a time-travelling archaeologist who also happens to be the Doctor's wife. Using this as a springboard, the BBC cancelled the hugely successful *Adventure Games* to create a new trilogy of stories revolving around the Eternity Clock – a record of everything that has or will happen in all of existence. The game cleverly uses time travel as a device to solve puzzles. One instance requires the Doctor to travel to the past to change the plans of some gas pipes so that an explosion happens elsewhere in the present. It's an interesting mechanic that isn't used to its fullest potential. Sadly, the game wasn't successful and follow-up stories appear to have been cancelled, which is a shame as Matt Smith and Alex Kingston are clearly having a lot of fun.

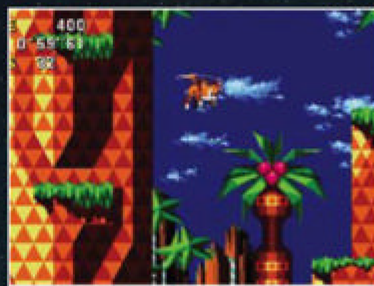


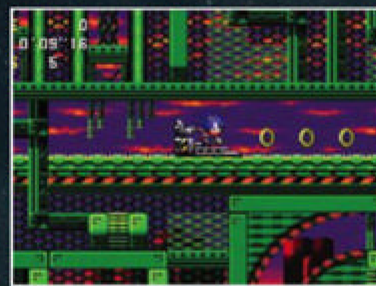
CLASSIC TIME-TRAVELLING GAMES

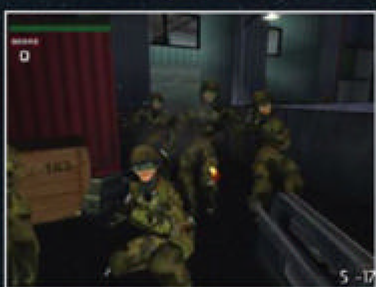
Got time to spare? Then why not check out these classic games with a time-travelling theme…

SONIC CD

■ *Sonic CD* was, and still is, unlike any other game in the franchise. It contains a hidden depth thanks to a time-travelling mechanic that sees its stages (not the boss ones) boast four different variations: past, present, and a bad and good future. During each, Sonic can travel between time zones by using signposts, but in order to complete each fully he must travel back to the past to destroy a machine; the consequences of which alter the course of history and reshape the future for the good.









TIMESPLITTERS

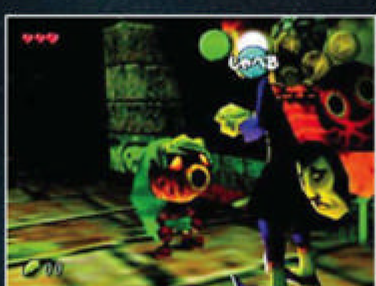
■ Free Radical's cult first-person shooter featured levels set in different time periods, all taking place inside a millennium dating from 1935 to 2035. This time-stretching canvas, which was used to paint a story about humanity battling an evil race known as TimeSplitters, was used to deft effect. It allowed the settings of stages to be disparate – from castles and ancient tombs to shopping malls and spaceships – as well as the enemies you faced, the heroes you played as and the weapons you used.

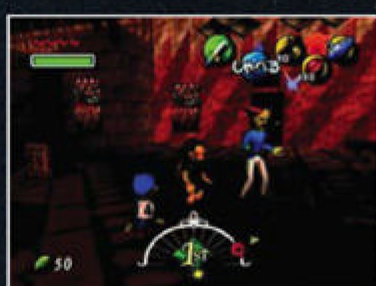
KOKOTONI WILF

■ A classic *Jet Set Willy* clone, the colourful *Kokotoni Wilf* saw players assume the role of a winged magician who must soar through time and space to retrieve pieces of a powerful amulet to nourish a sleep curse placed on a land of dragons. The adventure took place across six different time zones, beginning in the prehistoric era and moving to periods including 1066, Eighties London and finally a space station in 2001 – the latter a slight overestimation of technological advance we think there, Elite.







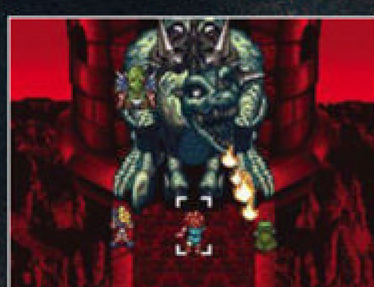


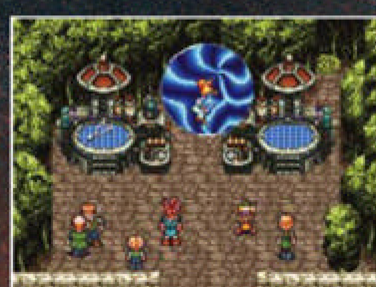
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

■ In the darkest entry in franchise, there is a literal sense of doom due to a moon on a collision course with your planet. Link has just 72 hours (three game days) to act, and must restart from the first day of the game over and over in order to complete all the tasks needed to prevent its imminent destruction.

CHRONO TRIGGER

■ Square's classic SNES role-playing game was never going to fail at feeling epic owing to its story featuring a wonderful time-travelling hook based on the butterfly effect. At the start of the game, the time travel aspect unfurls in a linear way; however, later on, the player and their party are given the freedom to freely travel between the various epochs – something which greatly enhances the adventure, allows for open-ended progression and also 13 different possible endings.





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The History of Star Fox

As Star Fox celebrates 20 years, we look back at the history of the franchise, remembering its heroes, villains, epic space battles and of course those amusing intercom chats

Star Fox feels like Nintendo's take on *Star Wars*. The similarities between George Lucas's universe and Nintendo's space shooter are obvious for all sci-fi buffs to see. From *Star Fox*'s (or *StarWing* if you're a UK gamer) title and X-Wing sounding and looking Arwing craft, to Fox McCloud's father issues, it's as affectionate a love letter to the *Star Wars* universe any videogame has ever written, but one that has succeeded in crafting its own rich sci-fi universe and fan base with a popular series of games – one of which helped popularise 3D gaming on game consoles while another often finds itself sitting at the small-digit end of best-ever videogames lists.

Though these days Nintendo seems more willing to rest on its established franchises, during the 16-bit era it was more prolific in developing new game characters and worlds and *Star Fox* is arguably its most cinematic. core story centres around the verdant Corneria and a





» [SNES] One of the things that set *Star Fox* apart from other space shooters was the characters; their amusing confabs over the radio helped enhance its gameplay.

brave band of anthropomorphic mercenary pilots, led by the fearless Fox McCloud and joined by his team-mates Peppy Hare, Falco Lombardi and Slippy Toad, who have sworn to protect it – often from the dastardly monkey maniac Andross and his Venom forces. The *Star Fox* series is unusual in that it has two canon paths: the original Super Nintendo one and the N64 one, which has been expanded with the sequels *Star Fox Adventures*, *Star Fox: Assault* and *Star Fox Command*. The reason for this split remains unclear among its fans, though perhaps part of the answer might lie with the games' development tales.

The original *Star Fox* was an extremely important release for Nintendo, helping the firm to finally break into 3D gaming. Though 3D graphics weren't new to gamers who had grown up playing on home computers, *Star Fox* marked the first time that many console gamers had seen them used in such spectacular fashion. But it wasn't just console gamers that were green to the delights of polygon graphics: Nintendo was pretty inexperienced too.

Nintendo has something of a history of looking to third-party developers for technical assistance – even dating as far back as its first ever mega hit *Donkey Kong*. So the story goes, back in the early Eighties Nintendo turned to Ikegami – a leading Japanese manufacturer of broadcast equipment – to help create the code for its pivotal 1981 coin-op. Once the initial order had been met, Nintendo reputedly cut its dealings with the company, resulting in a legal battle between both parties which was eventually settled out of court.

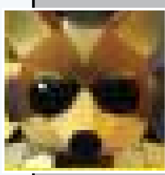
Fast-forward quite a few years and after various attempts to get 3D games off the ground had met with failure, Nintendo finally found itself a mentor in London-based studio Argonaut Games, which had previously enjoyed success with its *Starglider* series of 3D space shooters for home computers. Inspired by its founder Jez San's love of Atari's *Star Wars* coin-op, the *Starglider* games were fast-paced space combat simulators with eye-catching colour wire-frame graphics. However, when home computers began to lose some of their dominance in the UK, Argonaut then began turning its attention to games consoles, curious to see if it could transfer its knowledge of 3D to these new keyboard-less machines from Japan. Setting its sights on the NES initially, the team tested the water by getting a demo version of *Starglider* running on the 8-bit console. Dubbed *NesGlider*, when it showed Nintendo its tech demo, Argonaut was soon given access to the firm's latest state-of-the-art console, the Super NES, to see what it could achieve with the extra power that it afforded. ▶

Meet the teams

THE TWO GENERATIONS OF STAR FOX

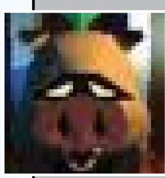
FIRST GENERATION

JAMES MCCLOUD



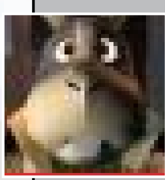
■ James is Fox's father, founder and leader of the original Team Star Fox. His current whereabouts are ambiguous. In *Star Fox 64* it's explained that during a routine scouting mission to Venom, James is betrayed by his team-mate Pigma Dengar and captured and killed by Andross. In the original *Star Fox* he is said to have disappeared inside a black hole – a trap laid by Andross.

PIGMA DENGAR



■ A pirate motivated only by money, Pigma's greed would tempt him to side with Andross and betray his Star Fox team-mate and superior James McCloud. Now part of Star Wolf, Andross's evil version of Star Fox, Pigma has become a recurring enemy throughout the series.

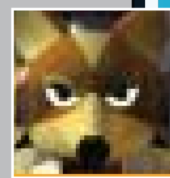
PEPPY HARE



■ A close friend of Fox's father, Peppy Hare was part of the original Team Star Fox and later joined the second. A solid and experienced pilot, Peppy likes to dish out instructions and advice to his team-mates, and especially loves to see them perform barrel rolls. Seriously, he's obsessed.

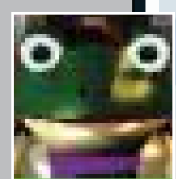
SECOND GENERATION

FOX MCCLOUD



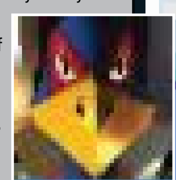
■ The brave and dependable leader of the second Team Star Fox and main star of the series, Fox joined the Cornerian Army to follow in the footsteps of his father James McCloud, who was the founder of the original Team Star Fox. Haunted by his dad's disappearance/death (?), he holds Andross responsible and vows to stop him and protect the planet of Corneria.

SLIPPY TOAD



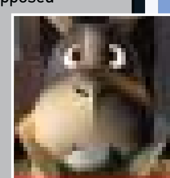
■ An old and close school friend of Fox, Slippy was also a cadet in the Cornerian Army. Like his father, Beltino Toad, Slippy is the inventor and brains of the team. The weakest and least competent pilot, though, he often finds himself relying on Fox and the team to come to his rescue.

FALCO LOMBARDI



■ A close friend and solid pilot, a friendly rivalry between Falco and Fox plays out during the series. After the events of *Star Fox 64*, Falco left the team for a period, for reasons explained in the side comic 'Farewell, Beloved Falco', but returned in dramatic fashion at the end of *Star Fox Adventures*.

PEPPY HARE



■ Following James's capture and supposed death at the hands of Andross, Peppy escaped to Corneria and took Fox under his wing, becoming something of a father figure. He brings his knowledge, experience and wisdom to the younger members of the team.



» [SNES] *Star Fox* featured many memorable boss battles, often requiring an element of strategy to beat them.



» [SNES] *Star Fox 2* wasn't the only cancelled game: there was going to be a Virtual Boy version and arcade companion to *Star Fox: Assault*.



» [ZX Spectrum] Argonaut had experience in 3D space shooters with the *Starglider* series.



» [N64] Peppy delivers his immortal line, creating an internet meme in the process.

"It felt like a man's game, despite the cute anthropomorphic characters"
PAUL DAVIES, GAMES JOURNALIST

Despite the SNES possessing far more graphical muscle, however, with its design goal being to handle impressive-looking 2D games, Argonaut soon realised that the console would still struggle to plot and manipulate polygons fast enough for a frenetic 3D shooter. When Nintendo was told of the problem, it commissioned the creation of a new chip specifically for the game, which was to be inserted inside the cartridge to give the console the extra power it needed. The Super FX Chip as it was known, though it was originally dubbed the 'Mario Chip 1' (Mathematical Argonaut Rotation I/O chip), was designed by Argonaut (chiefly Rob Macaulay and Ben Cheese) and would allow the Super NES to draw and control complex 3D objects and effects in real-time.

During *Star Fox*'s development the Argonaut team was split between its London office, which was where much of the technical and engineering work was done, and Nintendo's main headquarters in Kyoto. There, Shigeru Miyamoto, *Star Fox*'s director Katsuya Eguchi and Nintendo's EAD department worked closely with the relocated Argonaut team members who began sharing their extensive knowledge of three-dimensional game design with the gaming giant.

In terms of the Star Fox's origin, it's said that Shigeru Miyamoto found inspiration from a shrine to a flying fox god that he regularly visited, and its entrance was said to be accessible through a series of arches – something which is evident in *Star Fox*'s level design. In Japanese religion and culture the fox (Kitsune) is a revered animal, and in some areas of folklore portrayed as a faithful guardian and friend – both qualities that Nintendo would instil in Team Star Fox leader Fox McCloud. For the look and design of *Star Fox*'s cast of characters, Miyamoto enlisted the help of artwork designer Takaya Imamura, who had previously designed the characters for Nintendo's space-themed racer *F-Zero*.

With Argonaut's help, Nintendo found itself with one of the most impressive-looking console games yet seen, and when the press finally got to see *Star Fox* in action many were left awestruck.

"Everything about *StarWing* was magical," remembers games journalist Paul Davies, who was writing for *Nintendo Magazine System* at the time of the game's release, "Nintendo at the very top of its game. I particularly loved the subdued colour scheme, which made it feel very sci-fi, but the thing I remember the most is the whooshing sound effect of the thrusters. As attractive as it was, *StarWing* presented a real gamer challenge; the boss fights were especially tactics-driven. It felt like a man's game, despite having the cute anthropomorphic characters babbling over the intercom. I played with the lights off!"

In some ways it could even be said that *Star Fox* marked a move in how console gamers would perceive 'good' graphics in videogames, opening their eyes to the fact that 3D console games could be exciting and possess the character of their flatter peers. Shifting over four million copies, *Star Fox* was a huge success for Nintendo, and its impact on the industry was felt through the arrival of more polygon-based console games.

With *Star Fox* being one of Nintendo's hottest new properties, a sequel was expected. Originally it was Nintendo's intention to release a 16-bit follow-up on the Super NES. The planned sequel, dubbed *Star Fox 2*, was another co-creation between Argonaut and Nintendo. However, it was cancelled late into its production (so late that working Japanese ROMs of the game can be found online) as a result of departments within Nintendo juggling multiple projects, which included the Virtual Boy and N64 consoles. With its Super Nintendo successor the N64 (then known as the Ultra 64) soon to be released, Nintendo took the decision to abandon the SNES sequel and release the next *Star Fox* game on its brand new console instead.



» [DS] *Star Fox Command* introduced tactics to the combat, and marked the first portable game in the series.

Had *Star Fox 2* seen release it would have marked a different direction for the series – adding new vehicles and characters, fusing strategy to the combat, and offering freedom of movement in its space battles. Curiously though, despite the title's cancellation, many of *Star Fox 2*'s elements would appear in later games. These include *Star Fox 64*'s All-Range mode, which saw players control the Arwing inside an open space, and the tactical element of its gameplay, which later surfaced in *Star Fox Command*.

With a powerful new console that could easily handle 3D games, and Argonaut having helped show the firm how to do so, Nintendo decided that it would retell the *Star Fox* story. Though credit must be given to Argonaut for helping to lay down the template for the series, *Star Fox 64* (or *Lylat Wars* as it was released in Europe) is widely seen by fans to be best game in the saga. Filled with epic space battles and set-piece moments, including a memorable homage to the blockbuster movie *Independence Day*, *Star Fox 64* featured more stages, branching routes and popular new enemies, including a rival squad of pilots called Star Wolf. *Star Fox 64* captured the essence of what made the original great, but enhanced it with wonderful touches, including Rumble Pak compatibility (which launched alongside

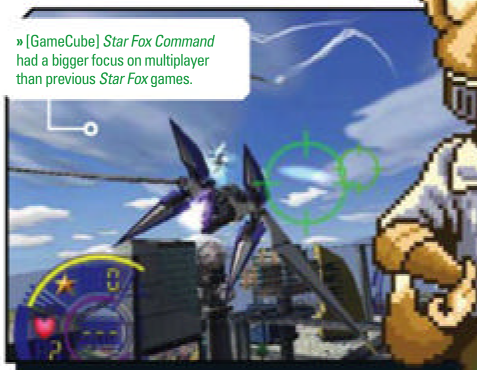
» [N64] *Star Fox 64* (released as *Lylat Wars* in Europe) is widely regarded as the best in the series by fans.



the game) and placing more emphasis on character and story development. Selling slightly less than the original, *Star Fox 64* nevertheless raised the bar for the series in the eyes of many fans. Yet despite its critical and commercial success, an N64 sequel never appeared – resulting in a long five-year wait for the next game to eventually materialise.

During the Super NES and N64 era, Nintendo had built up a strong relationship with another UK developer. Rare, the Leicestershire-based studio behind the Nintendo hits *Killer Instinct*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *GoldenEye 64*, had become a dedicated developer for Nintendo. When it showed the hardware giant a demo of a new 3D action/adventure game that it had in the works, dubbed *Dinosaur Planet*, noticing that the game's two heroes were foxes and that one, Saber, resembled a certain Mr Fox, the studio was asked by Nintendo to adapt it into a *Star Fox* sequel. Agreeing to its request, *Dinosaur Planet* started its transformation into *Star Fox Adventures*, its development was pushed back to the GameCube and most of the original dinosaur-themed assets were carried across, setting the theme and setting for Team Star Fox's next outing.

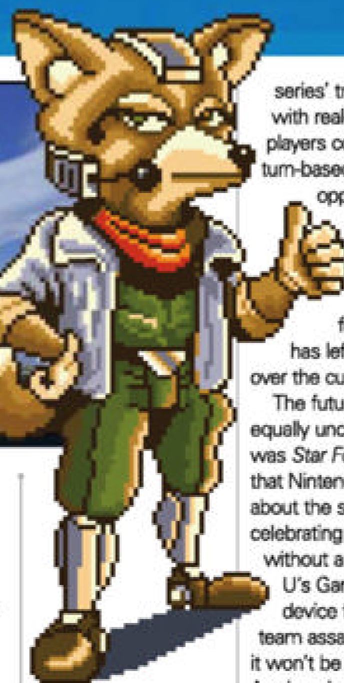
Star Fox Adventures marked a big departure from the series' traditional space-shooter roots. While the sections do appear, the bulk of the adventure plays out on foot, with Fox and his team travelling to the prehistoric planet of Sauria, exploring large open environments, solving puzzles and battling a new dinosaur threat. A sequel quickly followed, but with Nintendo and Rare's partnership ending after Microsoft bought the studio in 2002, it was Namco that was approached to develop it.



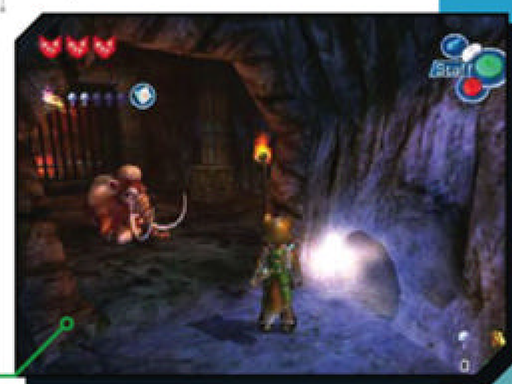
» [GameCube] *Star Fox Command* had a bigger focus on multiplayer than previous *Star Fox* games.

Star Fox: Assault was much more in line with the earlier *Star Fox* games. Its mission comprised a more balanced mix of on-foot shooter segments, Arwing space battles and Landmaster tank sections. Though the single-player campaign was short (it can be finished in a couple of hours), this was offset by a greater focus on multiplayer. *Assault* featured a robust multiplayer component that catered for all three gameplay styles and supported up to four players. It was also well structured, with elements and new content such as maps, weapons and characters unlocked by successfully meeting certain objectives.

With the exception of the 3DS re-release of *Star Fox 64*, the last game in the *Star Fox* saga is currently *Star Fox Command*. Developed by Q-Games, the studio of Dylan Cuthbert (who had previously worked on *Star Fox* while at Argonaut), *Command* marked the first portable entry in the series. Released for the Nintendo DS in 2006, it made use of the handheld's dual screens to combine the series' traditional space combat battles with real-time strategy. Its gameplay saw players control multiple characters on a turn-based battlefield; when contact with an opposing unit was made, the action would then switch to an open area air All-Range style battle. It was also the first game in the series to offer online multiplayer and feature multiple endings – which has left a bit of a question mark hanging over the current situation of the main story.



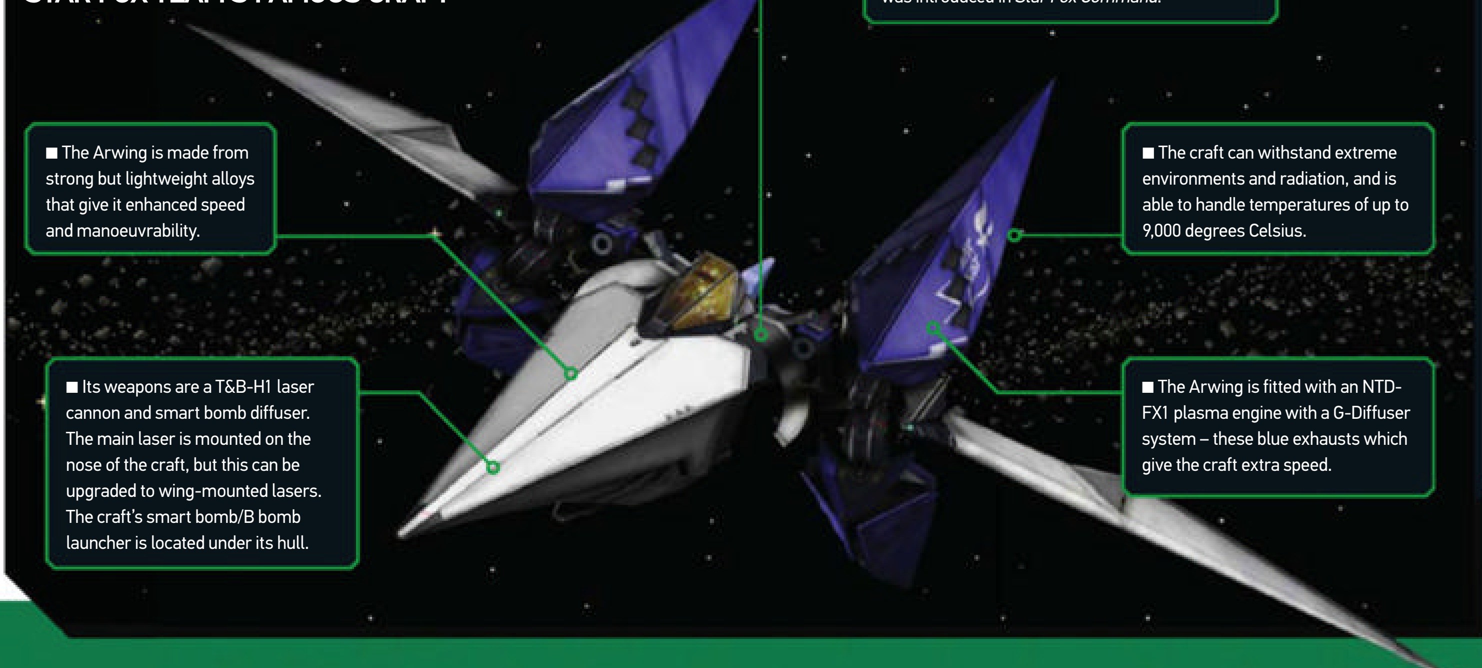
The future of the *Star Fox* series remains equally unclear. The last flutter of activity was *Star Fox 64 3D*, evidence at least that Nintendo hasn't completely forgotten about the series. However, with *Star Fox* celebrating 20 years this year, the Wii without a *Star Fox* episode, and the Wii U's GamePad seemingly the perfect device for enhancing and directing those team assaults, we have a strong feeling that it won't be too long before we see those Arwings launch into action once more.



» [GameCube] *Star Fox Adventures* saw Rare nurturing another Nintendo IP. It may not be a *Star Fox* game in the traditional sense, but it's still a solid sequel.

Anatomy of an Arwing

WE TAKE A LOOK UNDER THE HOOD OF THE STAR FOX TEAM'S FAMOUS CRAFT



■ The Arwing was designed by Slippy Toad's father, Beltino Toad. There are two versions of the Arwing: the original MKI model, and the MKII version which was introduced in *Star Fox Command*.

■ The Arwing is made from strong but lightweight alloys that give it enhanced speed and manoeuvrability.

■ The craft can withstand extreme environments and radiation, and is able to handle temperatures of up to 9,000 degrees Celsius.

■ Its weapons are a T&B-H1 laser cannon and smart bomb diffuser. The main laser is mounted on the nose of the craft, but this can be upgraded to wing-mounted lasers. The craft's smart bomb/B bomb launcher is located under its hull.

■ The Arwing is fitted with an NTD-FX1 plasma engine with a G-Diffuser system – these blue exhausts which give the craft extra speed.

Star Fox Star Map

THE PLANETS AND AREAS THAT MAKE UP THE LYLAT SYSTEM

AQUAS

■ One of two oceanic planets (the other being Zoness), this planet's surface is completely covered in water. It is believed to have once been the home to an ancient civilisation owing to ruins found on its seabed.

SECTOR Y

■ The setting for another epic space battle between the Cornerian Army and Andross's Venom forces, it is infamous for its high levels of radiation and volatile magnetic readings which can cause instrument and ship malfunction.

ZONESS

■ The second of two oceanic worlds of the Lylat System, Zoness was once a beautiful world that became a premier holiday destination for the Cornerians owing to its many islands. Now polluted by Andross, it has now become a toxic planet.

CORNERIA

■ The home of the Cornerians, it is the most developed planet of the Lylat System. It's a verdant world where most of the Lylat population live.

SARGASSO

■ The Sargasso Space Territory is hunkered down within the Meteo Asteroid Belt and is home to Andross's team of deadly ace pilots, Star Wolf.

KATINA

■ Corneria's arid sister planet, Katina is also Corneria's first line of defence. It became the setting for one of the series' most memorable moments: the Battle for Katina – an *Independence Day* homage that saw Team Star Fox coming to the rescue of the planet's main military base.

METEO ASTEROID BELT

■ Believed to have once been the Lylat System's ninth planet, this belt is made up of thousands of tiny asteroids and was used as an invasion route to Corneria by Andross and his forces in *Lylat Wars*.

PAPETOON

■ A small brown planet, colonised by Cornerians and the birthplace of Fox McCloud.

SECTOR X

■ This nebula was once used to conceal a secret research base by Andross, until Fox was successful in his efforts to destroy the base in *Lylat Wars*.

FICHINA

■ *Star Fox*'s planet Hoth essentially, Fichina is an ice world and home to a Cornerian outpost. It's where important and classified documents are kept, making it a regular conflict point between the Cornerian Army and Andross's forces.

SAURIA

■ Also known as Dinosaur Planet, Sauria is the world in which the events of *Star Fox Adventures* take place. Inhabited by dinosaur tribes, its climate and ecosystem aren't dissimilar to Corneria's.

SECTOR Z

■ The remnants of an epic and bloody space battle between the Cornerian Army and space pirates form the backdrop of this Z-shaped area of space, which was used by Andross to ambush the Star Fox team in *Lylat Wars*.

LYLAT

■ The Lylat System's main star (sun) sits directly in the system's centre. It provides sunlight and life to all the planets that orbit it.

AREA 6

■ An area defence zone that sits in orbit just above the planet Venom, Area 6 is heavily guarded by Andross's forces, which are stationed there to prevent anyone from reaching his base on the planet.

MACBETH

■ This was once a thriving mineral-rich planet but was invaded by Andross and consequently used to fuel his war efforts, its name now an apt reminder of its tragic past.

VENOM

■ A desolate planet that sits on the furthest reaches of the Lylat System. Andross was banished there by the Cornerian Army and now uses the planet for his base of operations.

FORTUNA

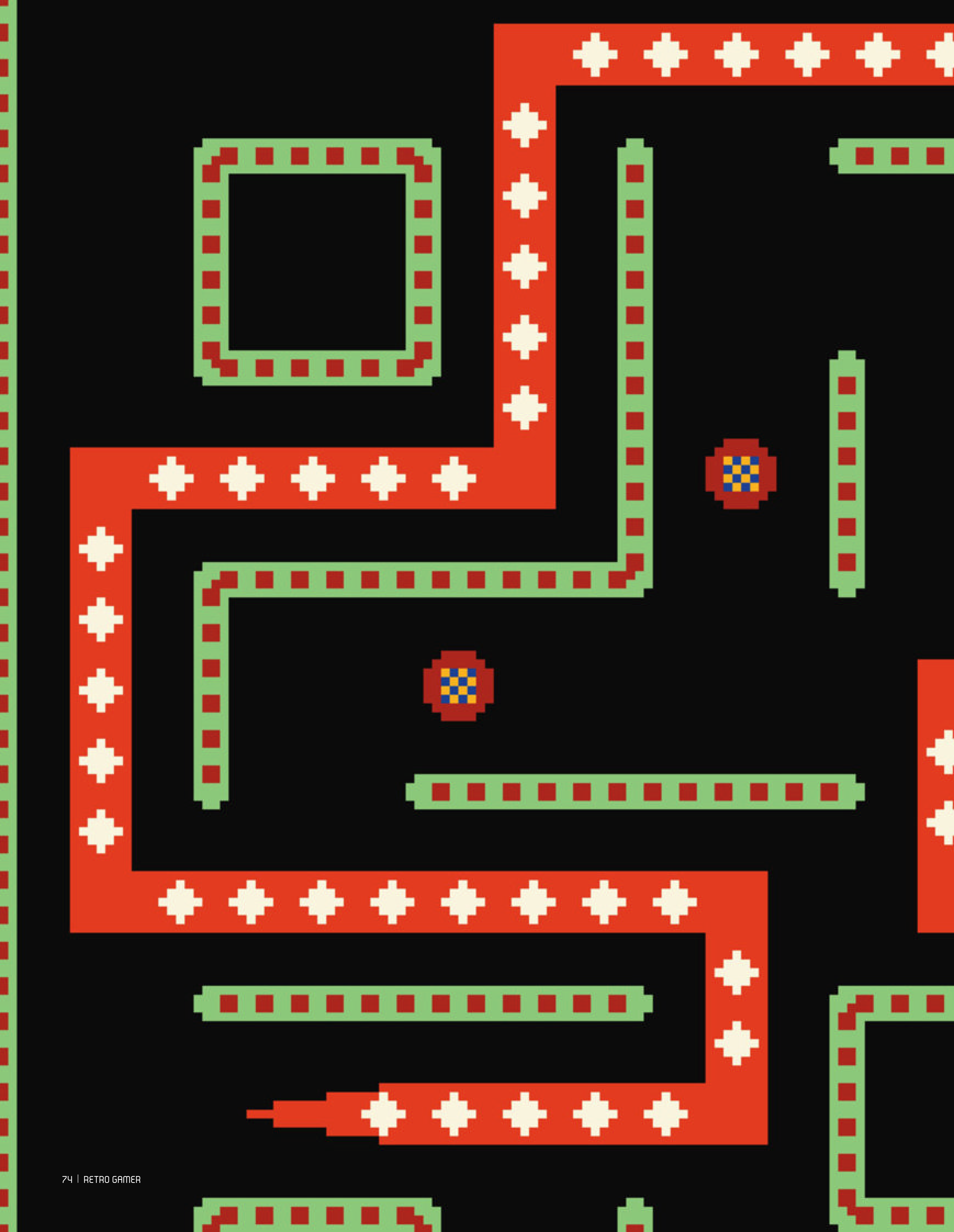
■ A lush rainforest planet, in the original *Star Fox* Fortuna also goes by the name Dinosaur Planet. Its surface is covered in vegetation and sea, though very little appears to be known about the planet's history.

SOLAR

■ A sun planet situated in the centre of the Sector X, Y and X triangle. Its temperatures exceed that which the Arwings' bodies can withstand, meaning they gradually take damage from the heat radiated from its surface.

TITANIA

■ An arid and barren desert planet, Titania is the world that Slippy crash-lands on in *Lylat Wars*. In the game, Fox rescues him from the clutches of the giant alien Goras with the Landmaster tank.



Nibbler

SNAKE? SNAAAAAAAAAKE!

» RETROREVIVAL



» ARCADE
» ROCK-OLA
» 1982

Do you know what a 'nibble' is? You read Retro Gamer, so of course you do. It's the term in computer science jargon for half a byte, which is rather apt since the allocation of a little more computer memory to store the score in *Nibbler* has made it a favourite among marathon gamers. The title was one of the first to be able to display scores containing nine digits, thereby affording considerable bragging rights to the first player to roll the machine at a billion points. Well, if you're counting in American that is – some of us Brits still insist it should be a million million.

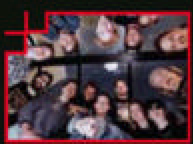
The game is one of a dozen released by jukebox giant Rock-Ola during the company's brief foray into videogames in the early Eighties. Those coin-ops, which were developed in-house, really are a diverse bunch, including the mighty *Jump Bug*, vector oddity *Demon*, deranged platformer *Levers* and the hypnotic *Eyes*. *Nibbler* shares the maze setting of that last title and has a similar mesmeric quality as you slither through its 32 distinct labyrinths, playing a highly tactical game of *Snake*. There are no enemies to evade, just snacks to gobble and your ever-growing tail to avoid, a task made increasingly difficult by fiendish screen layouts and dizzying speeds. It's a fun little game for half an hour… but could you play it for two days straight?

That's exactly what Tim McVey did in January 1984, playing a single game for 44 hours and 45 minutes, scoring a mammoth 1,041,767,060. "I've always loved *Nibbler* and honestly still enjoy playing it," explains Tim. "I'm always looking for the best pattern and perfection. I think I have OCD." While an undeniably impressive feat, we can't help wondering what effect such gruelling gaming can have on the mind. "By the end, I wasn't playing a videogame," he acknowledges. "The maze was a pattern on the rug on the floor and it was like somebody had walked around and left a breadcrumb trail like Hansel and Gretel. The Nibbler itself was actually a vacuum cleaner and as I walked around the rug cleaning up the crumbs, I was leaving the extension cord as a trail behind me…" Look out for an article on the weird and wonderful world of marathon gaming later this year. ✱

Crusader: No Remorse

After a mere four years at Origin Systems, programmer Tony Zurovec was given free rein and complete control over his own videogame, Crusader: No Remorse. Denis Murphy unravels the story





IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **DEVELOPER:** ORIGIN SYSTEMS
» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **PLATFORM:** PC, PLAYSTATION, SATURN
» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

Approached as "a game for the microwave generation", *Crusader: No Remorse* was a technical powerhouse of action and role-playing amid the backdrop of a tyrannical global organisation, and a world on the brink of having all freedoms utterly stamped out. However, the tale behind the game starts much earlier than its release in 1995 and involves an Atari 800XL, endless hours of coding, painting his grandmother's house, and ramen noodles.

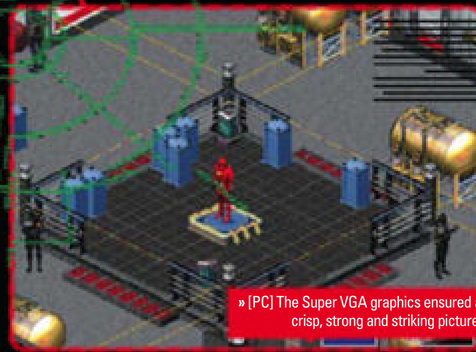
The story begins with a young Tony Zurovec convincing his father to purchase a Timer Sinclair 1000 (aka ZX81). Always having a strong affinity for anything technological in nature, Tony saw the machine as a stepping stone to something greater, despite its rudimentary 16K of RAM, which, while a step up from the default 1K, was limiting to his needs. However, Tony's efforts from the time may be forever lost, as he tells us: "I never managed to successfully save any of my programs to tape, and thus whenever I turned the machine on I'd have to write a new program to amuse myself." At this point Tony had his eyes on an Apple II, though the pricing was wildly out of his range. He settled for a Commodore 64, but hastily returned it when, to his utter dismay, "I found that the 'voices' that they advertised so prominently wouldn't actually allow the thing to create human speech that sounded like the Cylons in *Battlestar Galactica*."



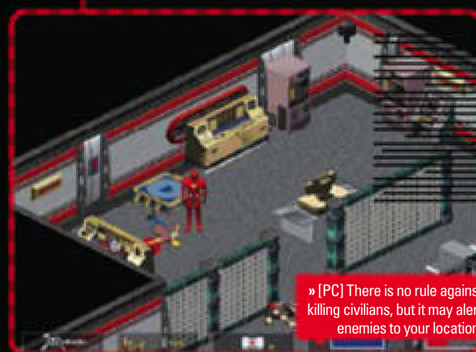
» [PC] The player must keep tabs on their shields, as well as their life bar.



» [PC] General Maxis, an ex-colonel of the WEC, and the leader of the Resistance.



» [PC] The Super VGA graphics ensured a crisp, strong and striking picture.



» [PC] There is no rule against killing civilians, but it may alert enemies to your location.

Everything changed for Tony when he acquired his Atari 800XL. "I spent countless days and nights programming it. I must have started at least a dozen games – and didn't come close to finishing any of them. I guess I had more ambition and imagination than perseverance in those days. I spent a lot of time on bulletin boards, but long distance back then was extremely expensive and one bad month led to an astronomical phone bill and a week of painting my grandmother's house as recompense." He then moved into phreaking, which led him to programming his very own long-distance access code scanner, as well as an admittedly mischievous program called 'Bulletin Board Destruction Set', which he rewrote time and time again, with each iteration making better use of the memory space at hand.

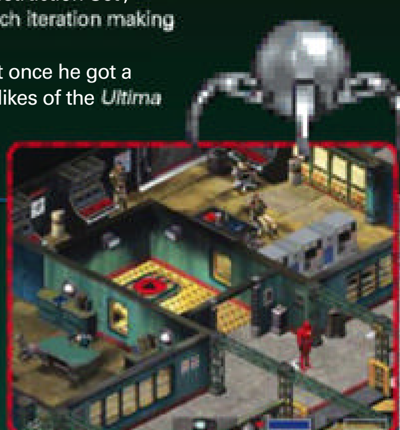
Tony's first game, *The Deceiver*, came about once he got a Commodore Amiga. Somewhat similar to the likes of the *Ultima* series, it was this game that ultimately helped land him a job at Origin Systems. As Tony recalls: "Origin was one of the most high-profile computer game developers in the world, and a friend of mine moved next to a guy that was dating the founder's sister and also worked for the company. I spoke with the guy and got him to set up an interview for me, and in late 1990 ventured up to Austin to show off my game. The funny part of the story is that in those days I would have gladly worked for Origin for free if I could have afforded it, but I'd recently bought an MR2 Turbo and had a very large monthly car payment. Dallas Snell, Origin's general manager at the time, called back a third time and offered something close enough to what I needed that I figured that I could just make up the difference by living on ramen noodles and crackers in perpetuity. I spoke with Snell a year or so later, and he said that the demo game that I'd shown was so far beyond what aspiring applicants typically showed that they never had any doubt that they'd be hiring me. If I'd have known that then I might have held out for a fourth offer and managed to afford some spaghetti or something."

> "I saw an opportunity in doing a story-driven action game that would be visually different than the multitude of FPSs"
>
> TONY ZUROVEC, PRODUCER

The Deceiver impressed, and it only took another three years for Tony to be behind the wheel of his own game. That couldn't have come soon enough, as he was becoming increasingly frustrated by the design direction *Ultima VIII* was taking. After pitching a real-time strategy game akin to Westwood Studios' *Dune II* that got shot down by the management, Tony once again returned to an old favourite for inspiration, *Castle Wolfenstein*. Tony elaborates: "I didn't think that its fundamental ideas had ever been done justice, and I saw an opportunity in doing a story-driven action game that would be visually different than the multitude of first-person shooters that were hitting the market at that time, and that

ECHO BASE

Echo Base was *Crusader*'s mission hub, the hideout of the Resistance, and a fully explorable environment with interactable NPCs. It helped build the world of *Crusader*, flesh out its characters, and served to make the game more believable, and more alive. Tony explains: "Echo Base helped establish that the Resistance were severely outnumbered and outgunned by the government forces, and that their only chance of turning the tide was to employ hit-and-run tactics while they gradually recruited more and more of the frightened populace to their cause. The player also saw first-hand the distrust and fear that people felt towards their character, and that made the gradual transition to trust and respect more poignant. The betrayal that was eventually revealed was made all the more bitter by the fact that it largely negated what had effectively been the reward that you received after each mission – a slowly improving relationship with the characters in the base."





» [PC] No need to use standard weapons when you have remote-controlled spider bombs.



» [PC] The best way to take out three enemies at once.

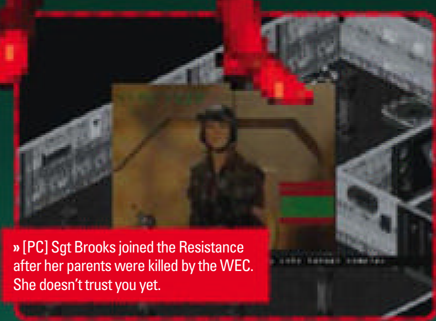
> "I thought that the visual quality enabled by Super VGA was so superior to VGA that players would view it as revolutionary"
> TONY ZUROVEC, PRODUCER

would intersperse enemies with a detailed world filled with a variety of traps and puzzles." After pitching the game with a detailed design document in hand to Origin Systems' co-founder Richard Garriott, *Crusader: No Remorse* was approved. The game was truly Tony's baby: he wrote all of the background fiction; hired the team members; operated as producer, director and lead programmer; handled the budgetary issues; worked closely with the art and design leads to ensure they nailed the look and gameplay he wanted; worked with marketing; had input on the box art, manuals, clue book, as well as advertising materials.

The player took the role of a Silencer, a super-soldier for the World Economic Consortium, who after a botched mission decides to join the Resistance, a ragtag yet technically competent force that oppose the oppressive WEC. In many ways Tony saw *Crusader: No Remorse*'s story to be somewhat of a warning. He explains: "I hoped to achieve a couple different things with *Crusader*. On the practical side, I wanted a commercial success that would justify Origin entrusting me with the time and money to develop additional projects of my own design in the future. Simply aiming for commercial success, though, struck me as an awful waste of opportunity. As I noted in the official game guide in 1995, I wanted *Crusader* to make a political statement – in essence, to immortalise a bit of how I thought about the world. I saw a real danger in society's inclination to gradually – over the course of decades and centuries – trust government with ever more power, and I thought that as a result the distant future would be far more Orwellian than most people realised. In that regard, *Crusader* is a cautionary tale, but it's a lesson that I don't think most people will ever grasp due to the inordinately slow progression from free society to oppressive dystopia."

The most technically daring aspect of *Crusader: No Remorse* was its use of 640x480 256-colour Super VGA, a decision that was deemed controversial at the time. No machine could render an entire Super VGA screen quickly enough to allow for smooth scrolling, which meant *Crusader* had to adopt a screen-snapping camera system that would occasionally force the screen to update its position. The trade-off of having this type of camera in exchange for the Super VGA graphics was more than welcome from Tony's perspective: "I thought that the visual quality enabled by Super VGA was so superior to VGA that players would view it as revolutionary." However, while already against the idea outright, he wasn't surprised that the console ports of the game never looked half as good. He recalls, "I knew that they didn't have enough horsepower to do the game justice. As but one of many examples, the high-resolution Super VGA that I'd deemed absolutely critical to the success of the PC version wasn't even remotely possible on the consoles. The outside developer responsible for the port actually did an amazing job in getting as much functionality onto the consoles as they did, but in the end, it all played out pretty much exactly as I expected. The PC version outsold the console versions by an astronomical margin."





» [PC] Sgt Brooks joined the Resistance after her parents were killed by the WEC. She doesn't trust you yet.

Tony's approach to *Crusader: No Remorse* as "a game for the microwave generation" was a success. He explains: "I thought that *Crusader* could allow

END OF DAYS

Seven more dystopian classics to try



SHADOWRUN (1993)

■ While there have been a few games based upon the tabletop RPG *Shadowrun*, the isometric version for the SNES was a more than worthy adaptation. Taking clear inspiration from the likes of *Blade Runner*, it not only let the player explore the murky, cyberpunk wasteland of the real world, but the cold realm of cyberspace also.



SYNDICATE (1993)

■ As opposed to *Crusader: No Remorse*'s fight against the dominance of an all-powerful corporation, *Syndicate* places you in the role of ensuring that comes about. Taking control of a group of cyborgs in a dystopian future, with the task of making sure that your syndicate remains on top, *Syndicate* is a classic, epic and violent take on the genre.



SYSTEM SHOCK (1994)

■ In this absolute classic, you take the role of an unnamed hacker that must go up against SHODAN, an advanced artificial intelligence that has gone rogue. Taking place on a space station known as The Citadel, *System Shock* blends survival horror and puzzle solving to create one of the most atmospheric games to date.



DREAMWEB (1994)

■ *DreamWeb* is a painfully overlooked title that starts out quite typically, but quickly reveals to the player that everything isn't quite what it may seem, leading to a rather epic conclusion. Visually rich in detail, with plenty to see and do, yet a little lacking at times in terms of substance, *DreamWeb* remains a highly memorable game that so few gamers experienced.



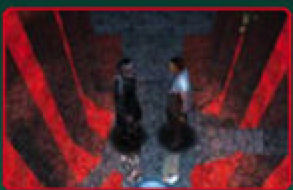
BLADE RUNNER (1997)

■ Based upon the classic film of the same name, *Blade Runner* places you in the role of Ray McCoy, a Blade Runner tasked with tracking down a group of Replicants who are murdering animals. Set against the backdrop of a dystopian Los Angeles in 2019, the game recreates many of the locations from the film to wonderful effect.



FALLOUT (1997)

■ On paper technically *Fallout* sounds like an utterly depressing tale of post-apocalyptic dystopia. Despite its potential dark subject matter, the game is brim-full of wit, personality and charm. Taking the role of a Vault Dweller, the player is open to explore the (almost) barren wasteland of Southern California. It's more fun than it sounds!



DEUS EX (2000)

■ *Deus Ex* took the idea of a cyberpunk/dystopian adventure and, for many, absolutely perfected it. With an incredible blend of role-playing, action, puzzle solving and a story drenched deep in conspiracies, there is a very real reason why *Deus Ex* is so highly regarded: it is such a perfect concoction of so many play-styles that any gamer will love it.



» [PC] Destroying generators will lower various shields.

people to progress in small increments, if they so chose, without having to sacrifice anything that would really be missed. As a result, there are no empty rooms in *Crusader* – there's always something of interest. There are multiple solutions to the numerous puzzles contained within the game, and the solutions are always in close proximity to the puzzle and thus don't require extensive searching, which I found tedious and boring. As a result, you can play *Crusader* through to completion in a single extended session, or gradually progress over the course of hundreds of five-minute sessions." It was this flexible approach to gameplay – along with interesting and highly destructible environments, its excessive stockpile of usable weapons, and a thought-provoking story – that gained *Crusader* not only critical acclaim, but also a strong fan base that still endures.

Tony had hoped that *Crusader* would sell at least 100,000 copies, yet it eventually sold well over a quarter of a million and generated a higher return on investment than any other standalone product in Origin's history. But what endures for him, the creator of *Crusader*? "*Crusader*'s background fiction is probably the thing that holds the most appeal to me, though, because while the game's graphics and gameplay primarily live on in memories, ideas are immortal – they're just as relevant now as they were when I wrote *Crusader*."

Even now, some 17 years after its release, *Crusader: No Remorse* holds a special place in the hearts of its loyal fan base, among which Tony would surely count himself. "It was the most fun that I ever had in the gaming industry, and the most exhausting."



» [PC] Sometimes, taking out civilians will prevent them from raising the alarm.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO



- » **Featured System:** PS2
- » **Year:** 2002
- » **Publisher:** Rockstar Games
- » **Developer:** Rockstar North
- » **Key People:** Dan Houser, James Worrall (writers) Leslie Benzies (producer), Aaron Garbut (art director)

GO DEEPER

- » ***Vice City* is the second bestselling PS2 game ever after *GTA: San Andreas.***
- » **The titular city appeared before in 2D form in the original *GTA*, where it was also based on Miami.**

33.



» **[PS2]** Rockstar's smart scriptwriting and detailed world-building focused on subverting Eighties clichés with all the benefits of hindsight.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

***Vice City* captured the Eighties vibe perfectly, showing off Rockstar's ability to craft an obsessively compelling 3D open world in the process…**

THE BACKGROUND

One year after *Grand Theft Auto III* steadily grew to be one of the biggest games on PlayStation 2, Rockstar turned around a sequel set in the Eighties but built on the same technology. With a world designed by a relatively small art team, the choice of era was determined because of its energy, visual potential and of course, its music – and since it had become cool again. The game was set in a much sunnier climate than *GTA III*'s New York-inspired Liberty City, too. Rockstar spent a week in Miami, snapping photos for inspiration in building the Vice City environment.

The thinking behind this, as well as creating a convincing period piece in an open-world videogame, was to give players more to mess around with in the city. So, motorbikes, helicopters and proper aircraft were dropped into 3D *GTA* for the first time, as well as an increased suite of silly weapons, most memorably a samurai sword. The city was built with flight in mind for the first time, too, while the cast was widely made up of celebrities, most notably Ray Liotta playing protagonist and rising criminal mastermind Tommy Vercetti. It was a bigger, bolder sequel that hit the game-playing generation of 2002 in its sweet spot, eventually selling over 15 million copies and surpassing the ambition of its predecessor.

THE GAME

If *Grand Theft Auto III* debuted the template of a modern open-world game, then *Vice City* explored its potential. By picking a very specific type of setting – one that would resonate with an audience in its twenties and over, who would recall the decade well – it plays smartly on nostalgia, with a timeless encapsulation of that era powered by *Miami Vice*, bad fashion and ludicrous excess. It's the perfect setting for a videogame built on stealing vehicles and causing mayhem. While its character models may seem rough by today's standards, the cartoon realism of the city is still a striking and extraordinary visual style,

Things of note



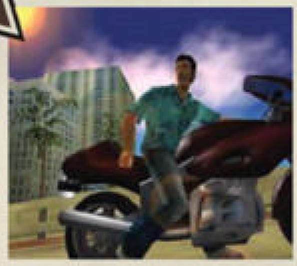
Twice Vice

Clearly deemed good enough for a second go around the block, *Vice City* received another outing in decent PSP spin-off prequel *Vice City Stories*.



Right game, wrong format?

Vice City's release on mobile last year was technically impressive, even if the controls are difficult in comparison to the PS2. It's worth it for the radio stations alone, though.



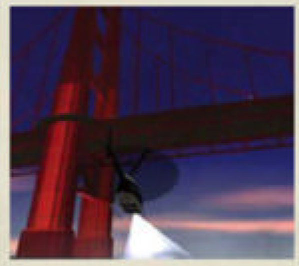
Celebrity line-up

As well as Ray Liotta as Tommy, *Vice City*'s cast boasted the likes of retro stars Dennis Hopper, Lee Majors, Gary Busey and Blondie's Debbie Harry.



Miami Vice connection

Miami Vice is clearly one of the biggest cultural influences on *Vice City* – even the opening credits and certain soundtrack choices are clear references to the classic TV show.



A long life of crime

Several of *GTA*'s characters – notably Kent Paul and Ken Rosenberg – reappear in 2004's *San Andreas*, linking the two stories together.



» [PS2] The year of development time between *GTA III* and *Vice City* is a bizarre contrast to the five years it's taken Rockstar to create *GTA V*.



» [PS2] The soundtrack was released separately across multiple CDs, such was the game's immense popularity.



» [PS2] *San Andreas* may be the ultimate sandbox, but *Vice City* trumps it in terms of atmosphere.

What the press thought

Play
Score: 97%
"Set in the decade that placed style over substance, the one game that has so much of both it'll take your breath away."



Armchair Empire
Score: 9.5
"The new setting is far more appealing than the modern Liberty City of the original."

a homage to Americana that turns Miami into a pop culture-infused criminal paradise. The city is the star in any Rockstar sandbox game, obviously – but nobody had ever played around in a location quite like Vice City before, and it still holds up incredibly well.

With palm trees, bright lights and a rich level of variety across its four islands, the opening moments of driving through the city at night with *Billie Jean* on the car stereo forge the tone of the second 3D *GTA*: this game loves the Eighties, but enjoys poking fun at its stylistic nonsense just as much.

Whereas *GTA III* mixed music from unknown artists with established performers, *Vice City*'s loaded soundtrack packs in every notable mainstream Eighties musician, from Tears For Fears to Kim Wilde, presenting an ocean of possibilities where you can find yourself hovering over a crowd of firearm-toting police officers in a chopper while *Crockett's Theme* by Jan Hammer evocatively plays in the background. *Vice City* creates those unique moments as remarkably as the other *GTA*s – but it's the setting and music that provide that extra appeal.

The *Scarface*-but-funnier story matches the chaos of the gameplay ideas in *Vice City*, with a likeable protagonist in comedy Montana-alike Tommy, whose rise up the crime ladder is woven into the fabric of the missions. *GTA III*'s hero was a silent observer to the narrative; Tommy is a proper part of story, and that engages you as a player. It was a challenging transition for Rockstar to build a story like this, but the quality of the writing and star power of the cast helps make the whole thing enjoyable.

Mission highlights include 'Publicity Tour', in which perfectly ridiculous fictional Scottish rock band Lovefist have to disarm a bomb while Tommy drives them around above a certain speed, otherwise the bus will blow up if falls below that speed – we all know, of course, that this was clearly based on the hit movie *The Bus That Couldn't Slow Down*. Crime epic 'The Job' is a brilliantly conceived bank heist that acts as a pastiche of every Eighties caper imaginable; with the addition of helicopters and other dafter stuff, *Vice City* capitalised on its potential and delivered a game with the sort of ambition that turned the open-world genre into a multibillion-dollar trend. Yet this setting, this trip back in time to a scenario that is a composite of different parts of film and TV culture, illustrated that an open world could smartly capture a real sense of place in a very specific time period, as well as be a pretty backdrop to nicking cars and blowing up helicopters.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

The open-world genre is still relatively new to games, really, but the very best sandbox environments – and we'd certainly count the likes of Hyrule from *Ocarina Of Time* in this – make you relate to the world in an entirely different way to that of a linear game. *Vice City* is a one-of-a-kind time capsule, an interpretation of the Eighties that feels familiar yet still fresh in its ironic take on its chosen era.

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City's control system is a little antiquated, yet it's still the coolest of the *GTA* games, even as they advance in terms of detail and technical polish via considerably more powerful current-gen hardware. *Vice City* is essentially a cartoon world – a love letter to Eighties America – and occupying it, by land, air or sea, is an unrelentingly pleasurable experience, 11 years later. It knows how to push those nostalgia buttons, yet under the blurry, colourful facade is a well-conceived, classily made title that deservedly found an enormous audience. Rockstar expanded the remit of what themes and level of detail we expect to see from games, bringing the kind of adult appeal to the medium that some have copied but only a select few have replicated in terms of mature execution.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

TASKSET

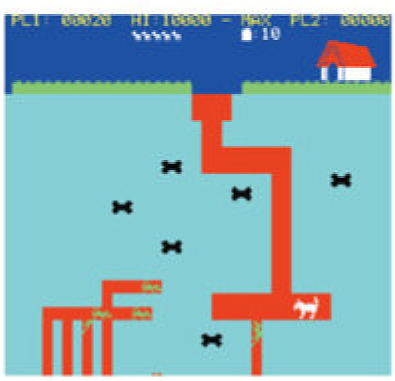
It was one of the most treasured software houses that flew the flag for Blighty-based game design in the Eighties. Mike Bevan talks lobsters, reggae and radioactive seaweed with the crew of the good ship Taskset

If you had a Commodore 64 in the Eighties in the UK, chances are you've played a Taskset game.

It may have been a tiny firm from a small Yorkshire seaside town, but the imagination, originality and playful British humour evident in its output won many admirers. Like the very best developers, Taskset looked at design differently, often drawing inspiration from the unlikeliest of places. A be-capped workman fixing some pipes, a chap sticking up some posters, or a red-honked gent just trying to get home from the pub – from these improbable heroes the Taskset guys somehow managed to produce cracking games. And if you grew up with the likes of *Super Pipeline*, *Jammin'* and *Poster Paster*, the address 13 High Street, Bridlington might just have an air of familiarity. Enter Andy Walker, Taskset's founder and head programmer, for whom being beside the seaside turned out far more stimulating than just a breezy stroll on the prom. "I was born in Bridlington but had been away for ten years," Andy begins. "I cut my teeth on pinball but when videogames began Brid was probably the first place in Europe to see *Space Invaders* and that was a whole new world. And obviously Williams' *Defender* remains the best ever…"

With his electrical engineering background, Andy was motivated to quit his government job and move into the arcade business. "I had a small company, Slogancourt Ltd which grew out of AW Electronics," he says. "All I wanted to do was write games. I had wife and family, mortgage… so to get enough money together to fund the time I needed, I traded in electronic parts, mainly those parts that would be useful in an arcade videogame: buttons, switches, monitors etc. I supplied the Open University with cased RGB monitors while thinking 'this'll be great in a coin-op cab.' I thought that the best way to write games was to build 'em."

Andy's love of *Defender* led to an arcade shooter called *Andromeda*, while a rather more original game, *The Pit*, was licensed to Centuri, going down a storm Stateside. But Andy had his eye on another upcoming technological phenomenon: cheap home computing. "Tony Gibson had joined and we were writing games on Tangerine hardware, round at my house, then later at the start-up factory unit," he recalls. "We did construct machines from scratch, but writing was much more fun and we ditched the factory. Home computing was really young in the UK, but standard hardware from the likes of Sinclair, Atari and Commodore was going to explode and the opportunity to write for 'stable' platforms was very attractive. It was spring 1983… time to add another company…"



» [Oric] *Dig Dog* – part two-fingered salute at Atari…

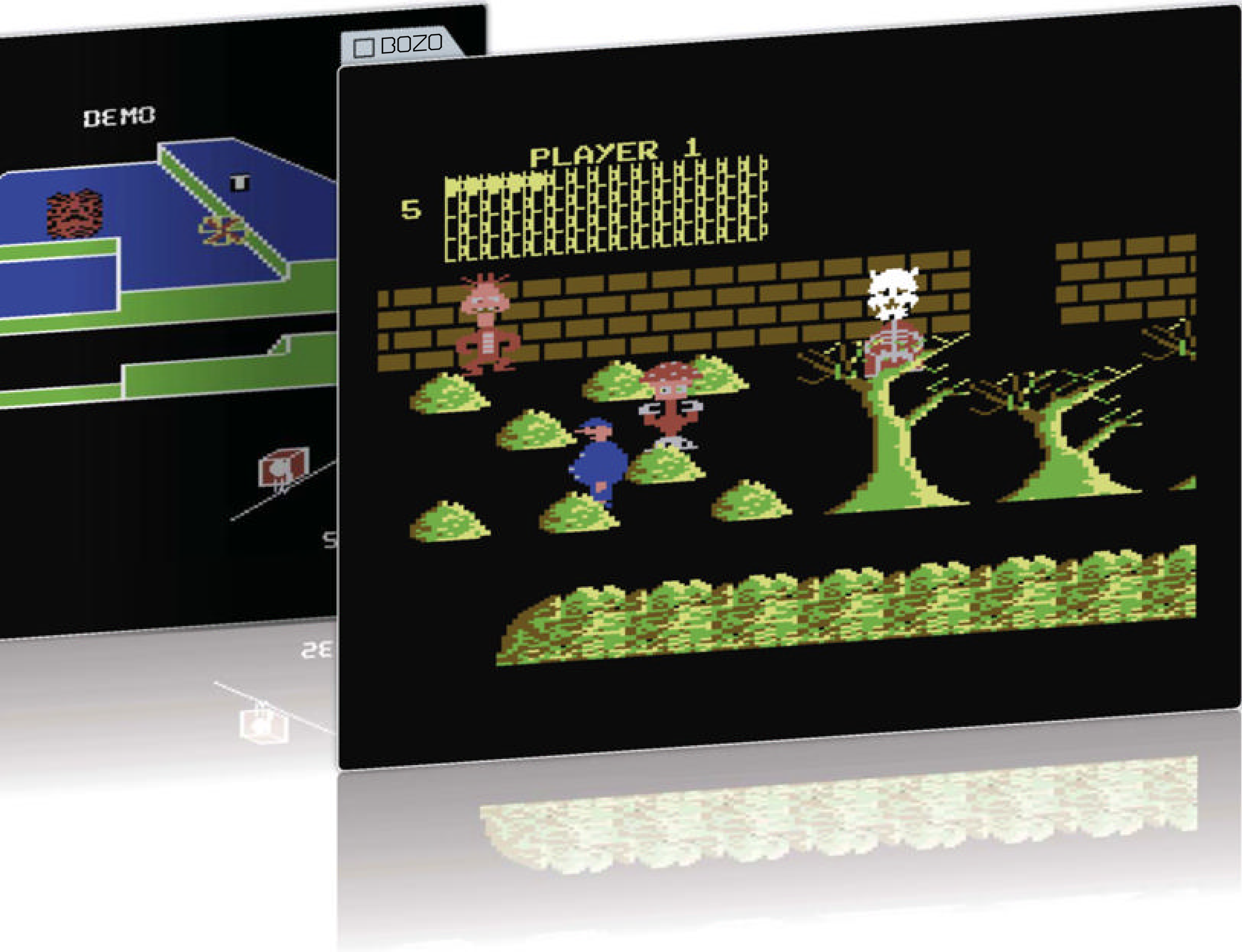
INSTANT EXPERT

Formed in the Yorkshire seaside resort of Bridlington, Taskset was a prolific and much-admired developer for the Commodore 64. Its games mixed cutting-edge sound and graphics with good old-fashioned working-class values in titles like *Super Pipeline*, *Bozo's Night Out* and *Poster Paster*.

The company was set up by Andy Walker, whose previous firm AW Electronics had designed games for the arcade industry, including the Taito/Centuri-licensed *The Pit*.

Taskset's games were very a much a team effort, everyone helping to pitch in ideas and contribute. Inspiration often came from the strangest of places, such as a leaking pipe in the office, or the sudden appearance of window cleaners in Bridlington High Street.

It's Taskset's 30th anniversary this year, so the lads hope to meet up soon for a few reunion beers, although hopefully they'll not be re-enacting any scenes from *Bozo's Night Out*…





» The picture-postcard surroundings of Bridlington inspired the saucy seaside humour of a few of Taskset's games.

BY THE NUMBERS

2 Taskset liked to release its titles in pairs to test the market appetite for the games.

3 The number of years for which games were released under the Taskset label… short but sweet.

£6.90 The price of cassette-based Taskset games on the C64 until *Super Pipeline II*.

11 The number of pubs in Bridlington High Street – the inspiration for *Bozo's Night Out*?

20 – There were 20 levels in Jammin', as players work through the game to reach the top chart position at number one.

200 The number of alien types in *Cad Cam Warrior*.

8,192 *Cad Cam Warrior* had 8,192 screens, which unfortunately mostly all looked the same.

£11,000 The cost of the Sage IV systems that Taskset used to develop Commodore 64 titles.

"We wanted to take real responsibility for, and be proud of our games"

ANDY WALKER

So, Taskset moved into premises above a bookshop owned by Andy's wife, complete with a nifty new logo and company motto. That iconic logo, with a Phantom fighter-jet blasting out a fiery 'Taskset', was incredibly distinctive. Connoisseurs of sixties pop art might conclude that it was inspired by Roy Lichtenstein's famous *Whaam!* "It sure was," confirms Andy. "I absolutely loved that whole series. I'd bought my two-part poster copy from the Tate and a talented friend translated it for Taskset." The motto 'The bug stops here!' came from the saying 'the buck stops here.' "We wanted to take real responsibility for, and be proud of our games. It sounds corny but it's true…" And of the Taskset name itself? "Off-the-shelf company," admits Andy. "We needed one fast… £99 got me one in 48 hours…"

Give a dog a bone…

Taskset's first project was *Dig Dog*, with similar tunnelling gameplay to *The Pit*. It was developed for the Oric, not an obvious choice given the other platforms at the time. "I really liked the Tangerine hardware and Oric was the same people," Andy explains. "Unfortunately, the Oric screen was essentially teletext and remarkably difficult for games." Although the firm's team ethic meant everyone chipped in on games, *Dig Dog*'s main programmer was Paul Hodgson, who would create many of those jaunty C64 soundtracks for Taskset. "I'm originally from Newcastle, so technically a Geordie," Paul tells us. "Before moving there in 1969, the family came to Bridlington on holiday every summer, and stayed in flats owned by a certain Mr & Mrs Walker, Andy's mum and dad. I only found this out after I'd got the Taskset job!"

Along with programmers Tony 'Gibbo' Gibson and Mark Buttery, the Taskset team was completed by another Bridlington lad, Andy Rixon, who had been with the boys since the AW Electronics days. "A greater portion of my misspent youth occurred in ▶



» Bridlington's quaint High Street near Taskset's old offices today.

those arcades where *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian* were my staple diet," he says. "It was always my aim to push graphical boundaries at a time when arcade graphics were almost an afterthought – to produce arcade gameplay with leading-edge graphics was our Holy Grail." In actuality *Dig Dog* was a not-so-subtle response to a dispute with Atari and Namco over *The Pit*. "I personally felt very offended that some Japanese conglomerate was set to profit from our hard work and potentially jeopardise our future in the industry," remembers Andy Rixon. "*Dig Dog* was a reaction to when our first arcade success, *The Pit*, was ripped off in various guises, the main [one] being *Dig Dug*."

Moving onto the C64, the *Defender*-esque *Cosmic Convoy* was next up. With its massive bitmapped planets and *Space 1999*-inspired visuals it was an impressive-looking game for its time, but Andy Walker remains critical: "Not enough depth…" he declares, "it didn't take you anywhere. Although I did enjoy the opening moments, the game played well for a short while, and it was the first outing for [a C64] interrupt-driven sound routine."

Rock and roll

Taskset's next couple of games were a pair of corkers. *Jammin'* invited players to colour their dreams red, gold and green in an innovative music-themed arcade game with puzzle overtones. Conceived by Tony Gibson, its musical motif, with Rastafarian Rankin' Rodney grabbing instruments and literally building up the game's soundtrack, was a perfect fit for the C64. "I remember Tony always had music playing in the office, he loved his reggae and most things synthesised," Andy Rixon reminisces. "His influence was massive – he even managed to wean me off Radio 1, so I'm forever indebted!"

Jammin's soundtrack was eclectic to say the least, with banging SID renditions of pop and reggae tunes, including crafty versions of The Beatles' *Lady Madonna* and *I Will*, and even a dash of Led Zeppelin. "Tony came up with the music he wanted although he couldn't really notate it, so some of it was trial and error until we got it sounding as he wanted," recalls music-guru Paul Hodgson. "I did slip a couple of my own in, though; for example, Jean-Michel Jarre's *Magnetic Fields* makes an appearance…"

The C64's sound capabilities have been rightly lauded over the years, and Paul is quick to sing their praises given his experience as Taskset's resident aural technician. "It was mind-blowing," he says. "Imagine, not only three independent oscillators with switchable waveforms, but a noise generator too. It was like having a Moog that did graphics. And this was at the time when most home computers went 'beep' if they did anything."

"For me the music was the mortar that bound the graphics and gameplay together, so had to be just right to create the correct mood and balance," comments Andy Rixon. And music was a big part of the enjoyment of *Super Pipeline*, an offspring of Taskset's typically offbeat method of coming up with game ideas, being inspired by a leaky pipe in the office and a lobster in a bathtub… "The whole leaking pipe thing was absolutely true," continues Rixon, "I was there and remember it well, a true light-bulb-over-the-head moment."

Pipe dreams

The leaky-pipe incident had occurred back in the team's arcade development days, leading to an abandoned game concept which was duly revived for the C64. Like *Jammin'*, *Super Pipeline* was wonderfully innovative and good enough to have

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Andy Walker

Andy Walker

Taskset's head-honcho is still in the gaming industry, although the electronic gambling rather than videogame trade nowadays. "I'm still coding. Slots are the business (and data systems to go with the slots), although not for the UK market – everything is export. I still haven't learned how to manage time, still late-nights before deadlines, nothing changes!"

Mark Buttery

Mark is still in Yorkshire, working for a large insurance firm, and the lads hope to get together with him soon for a few ales. "I've nearly run him down a couple of time in Hull," jokes Paul, "so if nothing else, an apology is due to him!"

Tony Gibson

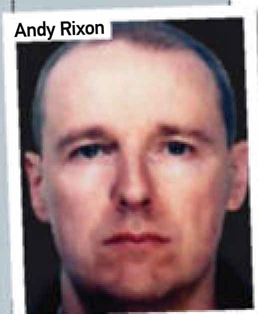
Sadly, Tony Gibson and Andy Walker parted company in much the same way Lennon and McCartney did after the Beatles. Post-Taskset, Tony went on to write *Ghetto Blaster* (featuring a certain enemy called the Tone Deaf Walker) and a *Jammin'* sequel for Mastertronic, before disappearing from the scene. With a Taskset 30th anniversary reunion in the pipeline (ahem) if you're out there Tony, why not let bygones be bygones and buy your old boss a beer?

Paul Hodgson

"How could you ever beat that job?!" asks Paul. "After Taskset, AW and I worked on a few contracts, then I finally decided to 'settle down' and get a real job. Nowadays I'm with ECM who make most of the game technology used in UK bingo clubs, which despite what you might think is incredibly hi-tech stuff. I'm no longer programming but the software background is still very useful."



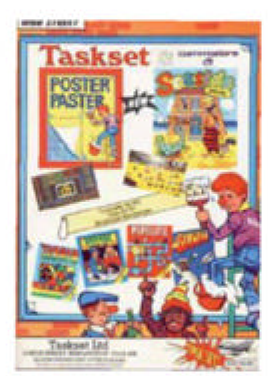
Paul Hodgson



Andy Rixon

Andy Rixon

Andy's experience at Taskset kick-started a career as a graphics artist with companies like Odin, Special FX and Rage, working on games like *The Untouchables*, *Power Drive* and *Striker*. "I'm now considering a complete lifestyle change and moving to Cornwall to set up a holiday let business," he says, "but that's more of a dream than reality at this stage."



» [C64] A cunning subliminal advertisement in *Poster Paster*.

TIMELINE

1983 – ANDY WALKER FOUNDS TASKSET IN PREMISES IN BRIDLINGTON HIGH STREET. *DIG DOG* IS RELEASED FOR THE ORIC, FOLLOWED BY *COSMIC CONVOY*, *JAMMIN'* AND *SUPER PIPELINE* FOR THE C64.

1984 – TASKSET CONTINUES ON THE C64 PLATFORM WITH *GYROPOD*, *BOZO'S NIGHT OUT* AND *POSTER PASTER*.

1985 – TONY GIBSON LEAVES TASKSET AFTER *SEASIDE SPECIAL*. *SUPER PIPELINE II* IS RELEASED, FOLLOWED BY THE FINAL TASKSET GAMES, *SOULS OF DARKON* AND *CAD CAM WARRIOR*.

1986 – ANDY WALKER AND PAUL HODGSON CONTINUE WITH CONTRACT GAME DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING *YABBA DABBA DOO!* FOR QUICKSILVA AND *UCHI MATA* FOR MARTECH, ALTHOUGH THE TASKSET NAME IS CONSIGNED TO HISTORY.



» A Taskset staff roll-call – left to right: Paul Hodgson, Kae, Adrian, Andy Nutter, Andy Walker, Andy Rixon, Ann, Mark Buttery.

been an arcade game in its own right. "Andy [Walker] encouraged everybody to contribute ideas, and that was one of the nicest aspects of working for Taskset," explains Rixon, who fashioned *Pipeline*'s graphics. "Let's face it, these were the pioneering days for the games industry and it was wasn't difficult to be original. With so few games in existence, virtually every idea you could dream up was original…"

Super Pipeline tasked players with helping Foreman Fred fill barrels against the clock while various nasties tried to sabotage your precious pipes, one amusing feature being the 'expendable' workman you could use as 'baddie-bait' to save Fred's skin. "This was another case of poking fun at ourselves," says Rixon. "The foreman represented AW [Andy Walker] and we were the expendable workers to be sacrificed for the greater good!" Along with the tasty gameplay, Hodgson's humorous soundtrack and Rixon's characterful graphics propelled the game to a *Personal Computer Games* magazine PCG Hit accolade. "When you look at the menace and movement that Andy got into the six-legged Venusian Pipe Spider in just one sprite-block, they became a classic," adds Walker complimentarily.

The game's most ominous baddie, the hard-shelled lobster, made its entrance in the game to a memorably alarming musical cue by Paul. "Taskset was always a team effort," he says. "Ideas got bounced around in the strangest ways. The lobster was thanks to Kae, our secretary, whose significant other was a fisherman. She got home one night and there was a lobster in her bath. You couldn't mention something like that and not find it being used…"

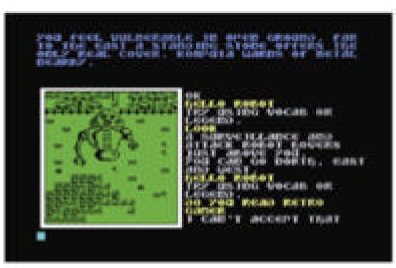
Out on the tiles

After *Pipeline* the boys headed back into outer space with a detour down the local high street on a Saturday night, with *Gyropod* and *Bozo's Night Out*. "We were trying to balance speed of rotation with the feeling of mass," reveals Walker, referring to *Gyropod*, a shoot-'em-up that saw players controlling a little gun-turret spinning around the rim of an orbiting space station. "There were long hours back and forth about control, feedback and the awkwardness of sprite-priority with that view." Rixon agrees that the game's development was somewhat prickly. "We created an awful lot of problems for ourselves on that project," he says. "Graphics, control method and gameplay made it one of the most challenging and worrying titles from my Taskset days and I often had doubts we could complete it."

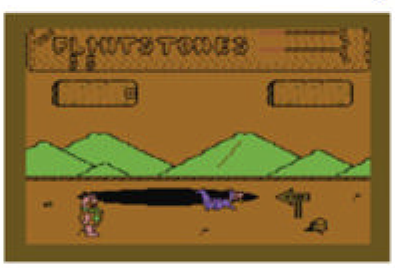
Slightly more down to earth was *Bozo's Night Out*, an unlikely arcade-action game that quite possibly qualifies as the world's first drinking simulator. A simple tale of hapless hero Bozo and his quest to get home from the pub, it was a humorously tongue-in-cheek homage to our national pastime. But we wonder if a product where your health was measured in pints and the aim was to get its lead character as sozzled as possible caused any ruckuses with retailers or the press? "It was called 'wobble juice'," laughs Andy Walker, pointing out that …ahem, no alcoholic beverages were involved in the making of the game. "But the hassle that retailers could have caused, it would have been a tragedy if they had cleared their shelves in response to some outraged pressure group. It was a different time…"

Down by the seaside

Bridlington's golden sands may have stoked Tony Gibson's imagination for his next game, *Seaside Special*, but it was a bit of a letdown by Taskset standards. More political statement than game, it had just a couple of screens: one where you picked 'radioactive' seaweed off a beach and another where you went to Downing Street and flung it at caricatures of Tory politicians. There ▶



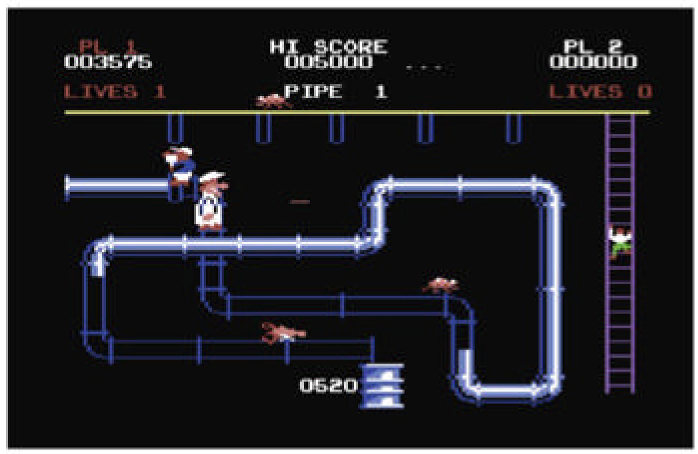
» [C64] Weird encounters in the interesting text adventure *Souls Of Darkon*.



» [C64] Andy Rixon's cartoon-style graphics were a perfect fit for *Yabba Dabba Doo!*

"The whole leaking pipe thing was true… a light-bulb-over-the-head moment"

ANDY RIXON ON THE INSPIRATION FOR *SUPER PIPELINE*



» [C64] *Super Pipeline* – see how the boss gets a big gun to defend himself while the little bloke who does all the work gets a hammer and diddly-squat.

JAMMING WITH PAUL HODGSON



Much more so than many software companies, Taskset's music was integral to the character of its games, and musician Paul Hodgson was the man behind the majority of its merry melodies. "I was a 'classically trained' musician, so I know what multipart harmony sounds like and could write it out," says Paul. "It really was a case of bashing out the notes on the piano, writing them down then converting by hand. The sound engine we wrote started out quite basic, but by the time *Super Pipeline II* and *Uchi Mata* came out it had all sort of in-line commands to do special effects. I had an old Wasp synth which I used to get the sounds I liked, then tweaked the SID registers until it sounded the same!"

Paul's musical background gave him a eye for picking that perfect in-game tune, from the Laurel and Hardy theme to The Scaffold or Paganini, as well as adding a few of his own. "*Poster Paster* was original," he says. "*Super Pipeline II* was an almost unrecognisable arrangement of the *Ying Tong Song*. That sort of game needed cartoon-like tunes. Other clips were a bit more esoteric. *Gyropod*, for example, uses part of the first movement of Widor's *Symphony no.5 for Organ*! It suited the darker mood of the game. In fact, some of the *Gyropod* music came from an unpublished AW arcade game called *GWNN* (game with no name), which I shamelessly ripped off. I was amazed a while ago to come across some guys on the web who remixed some of my old stuff… it's quite humbling."



» Paul Hodgson and Andy Walker pose with their most famous creations.



THE BUG STOPS HERE

The Taskset boys always took a lot of pride in their work, pushing the C64 as much as possible to make great games. "A lot of the stuff you don't see or hear is the bits we could be proudest of," states Paul Hodgson. "There wasn't much memory to play with, so we all had to be tight coders. We spent a long time pruning code so that it used the minimum of space or time. We had to, because Andy Rixon was a bit of a graphic perfectionist… why use four frames of animation when 16 will suffice, and those damn sprites had to live somewhere!

"We spent a lot of time on infrastructure. We always cross-compiled, originally using Superbrains, then a Sage IV, then an Apple II network (I still think the II was the best machine Apple ever made). There were always utilities to write – graphics kits, bits of wire and software to hook up the source and target machines. And we did it all ourselves, you couldn't go to PC World in 1983!"



> **"Cad Cam Warrior was definitely a very ambitious idea that didn't deliver"**
> ANDY RIXON RECALLS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY


» Taskset's first-floor development office, where those *Poster Paster*-influencing window cleaners appeared…

were rumours in the gaming press that the game had caused a rift between Tony and boss Andy Walker because Tony had wanted to donate profits from the game to the Green Party, but Andy Walker is keen to put us straight. "By that time, Tony was on a split-of-the-profit deal rather than a salary," he says. "What he did with his money was his business, but there was never any suggestion of funding any political party."

Poster Paster was another game that followed the Taskset's mantra of finding inspiration from everyday occurrences. "That came from window cleaners appearing at the first-floor Taskset office windows… right in front of Paul's keyboard," continues Walker. "We just embellished that idea with puzzle and arcade elements – simples!" adds Rixon. Along with these Taskset originals, the team decided to revisit their most popular release with the sequel *Super Pipeline II*, for the first time releasing ports for the Spectrum and Amstrad alongside the C64 version. "*Pipeline* was my favourite title so it seemed natural to develop the theme," says Walker. "All our toolkits for graphic and sound generation had evolved, and the more we learned about the C64, the more we could do."

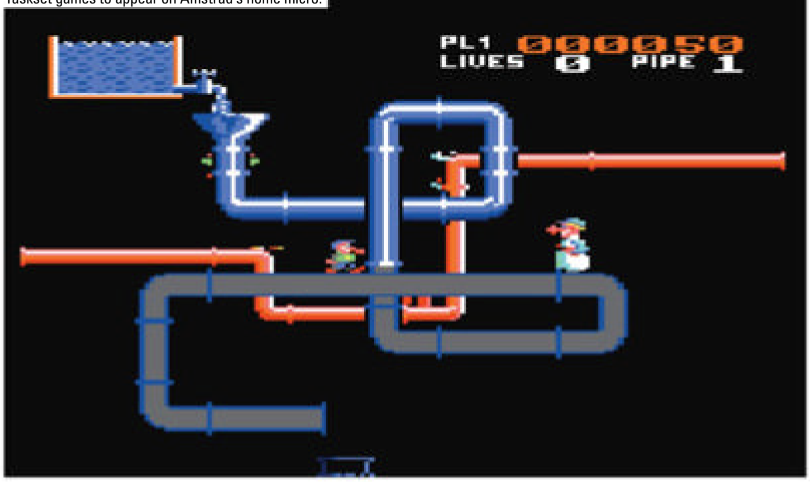
"I can only speak on a personal level, but I always felt the original didn't deliver graphically," says Rixon self-critically. "I relished the challenge to put that right and felt I knew how to achieve it; some may feel the original was purer, but it all comes down to personal preference." The two Andys certainly did a great job, *Super Pipeline II* being widely regarded as Taskset's finest hour, grabbing a *Zzap!64* Sizzler award in the process. Beefing up the original game with better graphics, more baddies and bullets, and an extra expendable workmate made for an even more arcade-like experience, and one of the strongest C64 releases of the Eighties.

Other sources of merriment in *Pipeline II* were the comical interludes between screens, featuring Fred and his workmates in various capers, like trashing Sinclair C5s or chasing a certain busty blonde, Benny Hill-style. "I'm pretty sure that the *Pipeline II* inter-level scenes were the source of much giggling and quick cover-ups," chuckles Walker, "especially the Ann-the-PA sketch. They were cooked up in lunchtimes and out-of-normal hours. I always suspected that there were unpublished others, but Mark always denied it… a bit too strenuously." Adds Rixon, "If I remember correctly, every member of the team appeared in caricature during the various cut-scenes, and yes, that was Ann!"

Good times, bad times

Super Pipeline II was the first Taskset game to be moved from £6.90 to a premium £9.95 price-point, so we ask what was behind this, and whether those naughty home-taping pirates were a factor. "That was a shame," says Andy Walker regretfully. "The industry had moved on. We began almost as a cottage industry, duplicating and sticking labels on, people would send us postal orders and we'd send them the tapes. It all moved to wholesalers, typically taking 50 per cent, but the quantities were very attractive. I knew we were being ripped off by pirates but to be honest, I never begrudged the bloke who found a way in and got himself a free copy, but I did object to folk selling copies – that's just theft. So it wasn't piracy, it was margins."

In early 1985, six months after Live Aid, Quicksilva's Rod Cousens came up with the idea for a software compilation in aid of victims of the Ethiopian famine, and Soft Aid was born. Taskset didn't hesitate to help, offering the barely year-old *Gyropod* for inclusion. "We genuinely wanted to do something and we had something that we could give, so it seemed a natural," comments Walker. "Looking back, it was pretty easy to do… we didn't have to go to Sierra Leone to build schools for kids or really put ourselves out."



» [Amstrad] *Super Pipeline II* is one of the only Taskset games to appear on Amstrad's home micro.

The team had also been working on what would be their most ambitious title, an enormous arcade-adventure called *Cad Cam Warrior*. A pre-release article in *Big K* magazine boasted of 8,192 screens and an interesting inverted playfield mechanic, but it soon became evident that most of the screens looked very similar and played rather repetitively. "It was more than 'big is good'," declares Walker. "I hoped that players could get lost in the game. Somehow the magnitude and the completion-trail just didn't work. Mapping occupied a fair while, but that wasn't enough."

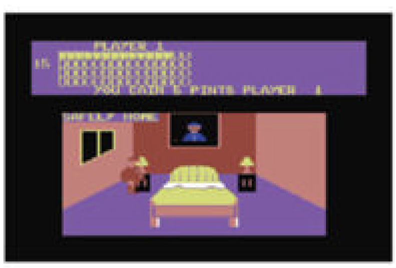
Cad Cam Warrior was definitely a very ambitious idea that didn't deliver," admits Rixon. "Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but in many ways it was a concept beyond the C64's capability and our production schedules of the day." *Souls Of Darkon*, the final release under the Taskset banner, was also disappointing. Despite an interesting fantasy steampunk setting, this illustrated text adventure was let down by a limited parser, earning a mediocre 40% rating in *Zzap!* magazine. Walker is unrepentant, explaining how the game fit into Taskset's approach of always trying to do something different. "I don't think you should do what people may expect; we did it because we could," he offers. "It fascinated me and was built around a really good story."

Thank you

The Taskset tale doesn't quite end here, however. The team's ties with Quicksilva on Soft Aid led to freelance work on *Flintstones* spin-off *Yabba Dabba Doo!*, Rixon's final project before leaving for Odin Computer Graphics. Andy Walker and Paul Hodgson also worked on Martech's well-received judo sim *Uchi Mata*, and Software Projects' ambitious home versions of *Dragon's Lair*. "You generally wouldn't take on contract writing for the fun of design," admits Walker. "Okay, I still enjoy writing software but the whole creation is better to look back on, and if the title, the characters and the theme isn't yours it reverts to 'a good job' instead of pride, giggles, tears and coffee."

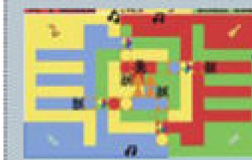
With one hugely popular Commodore machine giving way to another, it might have been the ideal time for the lads to transfer their talents from 8-bit to 16-bit game design."Taskset on Amiga would have been a great combination," agrees Walker. It wasn't to be, though. "I learned that I was better at writing than running a business. It dawned on me, very late, that businesses need full-time managers, and also I didn't understand or really like selling. I'd rather learn a new processor op-code set than the dialling-code for a wholesale buyer... Everything moved on, the studios became businesses and the Taskset business model was, well, not much to do with business…"

Still, we'll always have the likes of *Super Pipeline II* and *Jammin'* to remind us of those glory days in sunny Bridlington. And wait, how could we do a Taskset feature without mentioning Andy Walker's pride and joy, that famous Camaro from his Taskset days? "Oh, how I loved the old Camaro, I went everywhere in it," he says with a twinkle in his eye. "I had been known to drive the 100 yards from home to Taskset in it often. It had absolutely no manners – cross-ply tyres on a live rear-axle… spent a lot of time sideways. Added a hot cam and tuned exhaust headers but, in the end, couldn't afford to keep it." Shame… "On that Camaro… It sounded great," comments Rixon, "but the best thing was it always gave us two minutes heads-up on when AW was arriving at the office! Thank you Andy!"

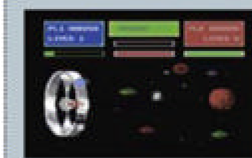


» [C64] It's finally bedtime for Bozo.

SIX OF THE BEST



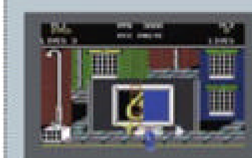
Jammin' (1983)
You guided Rankin' Rodney across the playfield, nabbing instruments and avoiding baddies like bum notes and distortion. With its clever colour-switching puzzle mechanic and rockin' DIY soundtrack, it was a deserving cult hit.



Gyropod (1984)
In a graphically unique twist, *Gyropod* saw your ship spinning 360 degrees around the circular rim of a space station, giving you an extra dimension to think about (or hide behind) while a *Jetpac*-style mini-game rounded out the package.



Bozo's Night Out (1984)
The boozy hero had to fend off belligerent grannies, ladies of the night and footie hooligans on the way back home from the pub. And seeing pink elephants to the strains of *Roll Out The Barrel* and *Lily The Pink*?! Taskset, we salute you…



Poster Paster (1984)
It saw players trying to assemble various jigsaw-like posters onto their hoardings while fending off beasties and trying to balance their Paste Consistency Gauge. The controls could be fiddly but overall it was another fun and inventive Taskset romp.

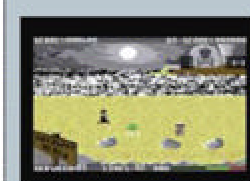


Super Pipeline II (1985)
This superb sequel ramped up the frenetic gameplay, adding more on-screen enemies, better collision detection and an extra expendable workmate. Rixon's colourful cartoon visuals combined with Hodgson's lively Goons-inspired soundtrack.

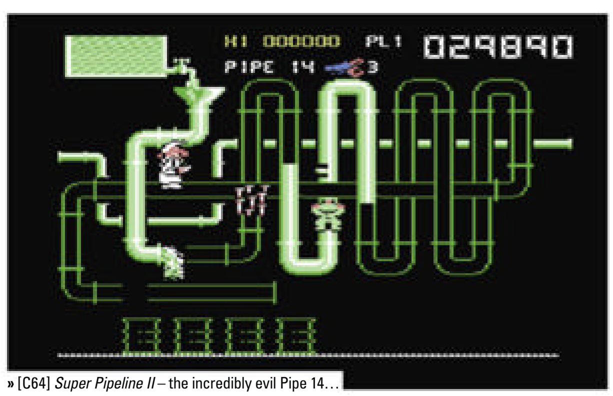


Uchi Mata (1986)
Although not technically a Taskset game, *Uchi Mata* is notable for including *Street Fighter II*-style swirly-joystick moves five years before Capcom came up with them. Plus we hear Mr Walker got to meet the legendary Brian Jacks!

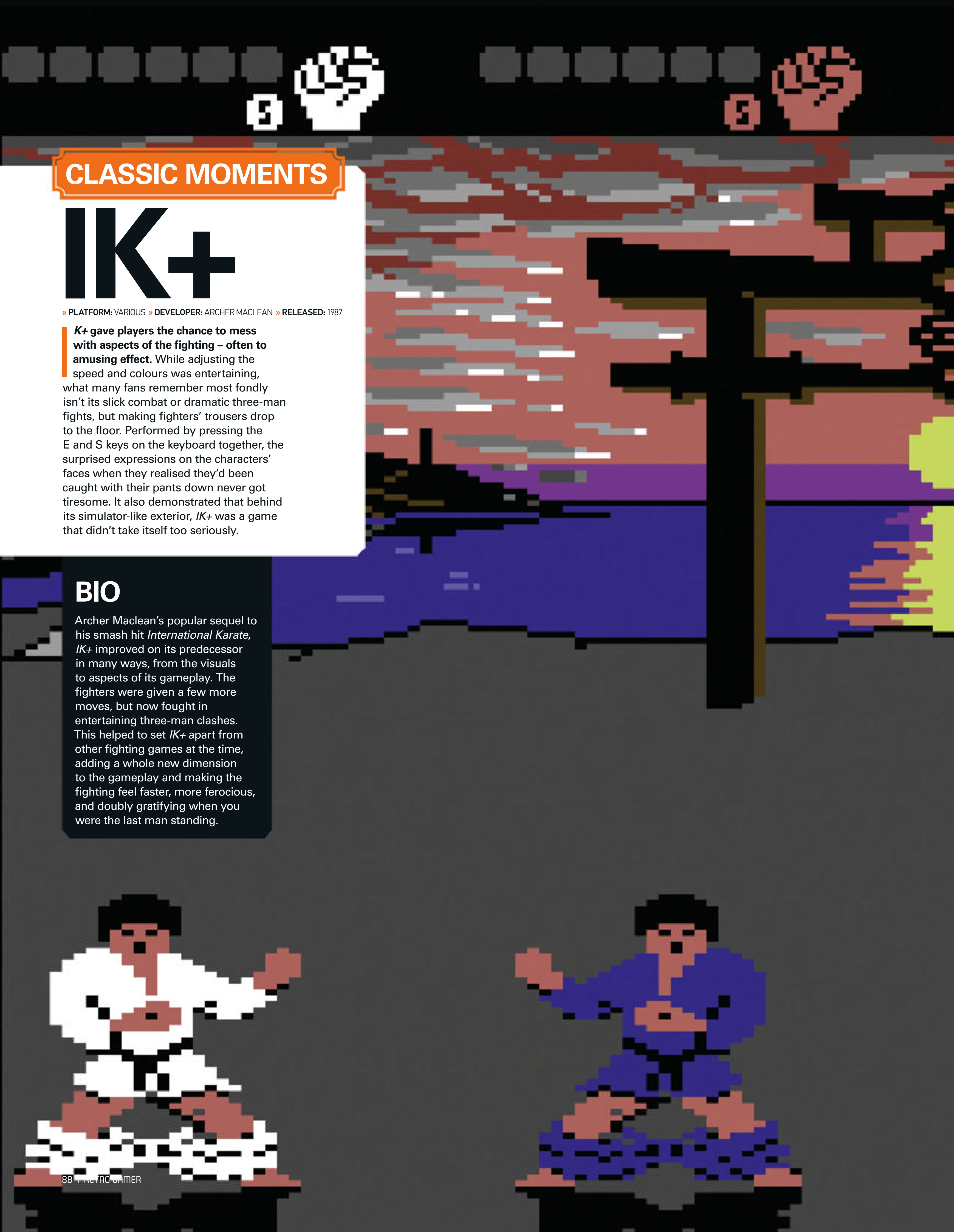
ONE TO AVOID



Seaside Special (1985)
Tony Gibson's final Taskset game was rather disappointing. Inspired by the Sellafield nuclear scare, *Seaside Special*'s gameplay was minimal, and gathering plutonium-enriched seaweed to chuck at the residents of Downing Street was much less fun than it sounds.



» [C64] *Super Pipeline II* – the incredibly evil Pipe 14…



CLASSIC MOMENTS

IK+

» PLATFORM: VARIOUS **» DEVELOPER:** ARCHER MACLEAN **» RELEASED:** 1987

***K+* gave players the chance to mess with aspects of the fighting – often to amusing effect.** While adjusting the speed and colours was entertaining, what many fans remember most fondly isn't its slick combat or dramatic three-man fights, but making fighters' trousers drop to the floor. Performed by pressing the E and S keys on the keyboard together, the surprised expressions on the characters' faces when they realised they'd been caught with their pants down never got tiresome. It also demonstrated that behind its simulator-like exterior, *IK+* was a game that didn't take itself too seriously.

BIO

Archer Maclean's popular sequel to his smash hit *International Karate*, *IK+* improved on its predecessor in many ways, from the visuals to aspects of its gameplay. The fighters were given a few more moves, but now fought in entertaining three-man clashes. This helped to set *IK+* apart from other fighting games at the time, adding a whole new dimension to the gameplay and making the fighting feel faster, more ferocious, and doubly gratifying when you were the last man standing.



MORE CLASSIC IK+ MOMENTS



Three-way fighting

The most prominent new feature in the sequel was the addition of a third fighter (in the previous game the fighting was purely one-on-one). With one CPU fighter always on screen (if playing solo, you faced off against two CPU fighters), players could use it to recreate *Double Dragon*'s famous friend vs friend final fight over and over and over. Amazingly, it's a trick rarely used by other fighting games.



Life's a beach

While the first *IK* featured different backdrops that took inspiration from iconic locations from around the globe, *IK+* featured just one locale, an inviting-looking beach, but it was a beauty. Stunningly animated – and with lots of nice details, such as a hanging spider and jumping fish – it more than made up for the lack of scenic variety. Remember, it's quality not quantity.



Bonus game

After every few rounds, players got to compete in a challenging bonus round. Breaking up the fighting nicely, this *California Games*-style distraction saw players using a shield to deflect bouncing balls as they entered the screen from stage left and right. Some versions added a second bonus game that had players kicking lit bombs off the screen. Needless to say, they're rather tricky to complete.



Punchy music

No stone was left unpolished in *IK+*. Even the music received attention. The composition for the sequel was a catchy remix of Rob Hubbard's original and excellent *International Karate* score. It complemented the new refreshed feel of the visuals and the gameplay nicely; not only that, but it was a great soundtrack to get ready to before hitting the clubs in 1987.

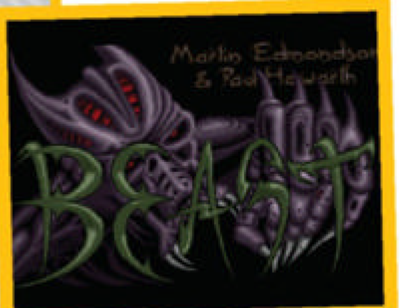


In the chair with...

MARTIN EDMONDSON

He caused countless Amiga owners' jaws to hit the floor with Shadow Of The Beast and designed two of the most popular racing series on PlayStation. Reflections Interactive founder Martin Edmondson talks to Stuart Hunt about his tech-pushing career in the games industry

CUTTING HIS PROGRAMMING teeth on the BBC Micro before taking Amiga visuals by the throat, Martin Edmondson is the founder of Reflections Interactive and creator of the cult Amiga series *Shadow Of The Beast*. Establishing a strong relationship with Psygnosis during the 16-bit period saw Reflections get an invitation to the exciting world of PlayStation, and this marked a new chapter for the studio that would see it reinvent itself as one of the most exciting developers of 3D tech-pushing console racers. No longer a part of Reflections after selling it and pursuing new business ventures, Martin kindly agreed to talk to us about his time in the games industry, the early days of Reflections and the highs and lows of the *Driver* series.



» [Amiga] *Shadow Of The Beast* was Martin's first big hit.

Can you recall when you discovered videogames?
The thing that really started it was just being a kid and going to things like ice skating rinks and swimming baths with your parents, and I remember at our local ice rink they had a line of videogames. There were things like *Asteroids* and *Centipede* and I just got hooked on them and found them fascinating. So that's how it started. Actually getting into programming just came about as if you're interested in something and find it fascinating, you want to try to understand the inner workings of it and ultimately try and do something similar, if not try to better it. It became a bit of a fascination for me trying to do what arcade games were doing with vastly superior hardware on home computers.

What was your first computer?

We had a ZX81 at school, but the first machine I ever had personally was a BBC Micro. We got it for Christmas, and we got a BBC Micro A that had the memory upgraded so we could play all the games, and I started programming on that.

Tell us about your first published BBC game for Superior Software?
Basically, myself and a school friend, a guy named Nicholas Chamberlain, had just started messing around with machine code and designed this game that was like a four-directional scrolling exploration game set inside a castle. We called it *Ravenskull* and it was quite nice in that it was smooth. That was the first game we developed and it took us around six months. That was partly because we were at school at the time. We took it to see Superior Software, they loved it and suggested a couple of relatively minor alterations and very soon after that we had a contract signed and they published it and few other games for us.

When did you form Reflections?
I don't recall when we started calling the company Reflections. And strangely, the name of the company was born out of a piece of artwork that I did on the ST or the Amiga. It was the word 'reflections' written across a microchip floating in space. Now, the word could have been anything; at that point I was just fascinated by chrome for some reason, so I wrote 'reflections' in the chrome. Looking back, it probably wasn't a brilliant name. Even now sometimes it just reminds me of a hairdressers or something, but still it stuck… When we got into 16-bit, then at that point it formally became Reflections.

So did you take a break from writing games between the BBC Micro and ST/Amiga period?
We did start another game for Superior Software, based on the Milk Tray [TV] advert that used to run in the Eighties. We developed


SELECTED TIMELINE
Ravenskull (BBC Micro) 1987
Stryker's Run (Acorn Electron) 1987
Ballistix (Various) 1989
Shadow Of The Beast (Various) 1989
Awesome (Amiga) 1990
Shadow Of The Beast II (Various) 1990
Shadow Of The Beast III (Amiga) 1993
Destruction Derby (Various) 1995
Destruction Derby 2 (PlayStation, PC) 1996
Driver (PlayStation, PC) 1999
Driver 2 (PlayStation) 2000
Stuntman (PS2) 2002
Driv3r (PS2, Xbox, PC) 2004
Driver San Francisco (Various) 2011
"I started designing Driver in a very rudimentary form for the Amiga. It's a funny way how Driver came about, but it started out as a top-down game"

this game and got quite a long way through before we discovered that they actually didn't have an agreement in place with Cadbury. So the name got pulled, which would've been okay except that a lot of the cues inside the game were tailored specifically to that advert. This was interspersed with a bit of quiet time and seeing a few people get burned on some of those 8-bit consoles… There was a quiet period before we got back into it again.

Shadow Of The Beast was Reflections' first big hit. Where did you find inspiration for the game?
I would say that the inspiration for *Shadow* was arcade games… smooth scrolling, parallax scrolling, lots of colours, fairly big monsters – all the stuff that arcade hardware could do that home machines at the time couldn't really do. From a general style and look from the hardware side, it was driven by arcade games; but on the real sort of artistic side it was driven by a lot of art by fantasy artists like Roger Dean and Rodney Matthews.

With _SOTB_ were you also trying to capture the challenge and often wafer-thin nature of action arcade games as well as their visuals?
I would accept that *SOTB* was very hard and also that it was also pretty tissue paper thin as a game because it was basically designed as a graphical and sound extravaganza and not a beautifully polished game. It was just a graphical demo that turned into a game. But it wasn't an intention to mimic the way arcade games were short and difficult, so I suppose the answer to that is not deliberately so, no.

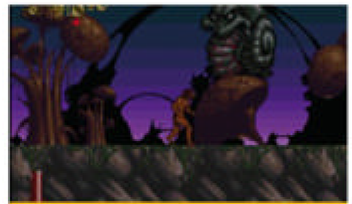


» [Amiga] Psygnosis backed *SOTB* heavily, releasing it in a big box with a T-shirt inside.

It sounds like you were aware of _SOTB_'s shortcomings, so were you surprised by its huge success?
I wasn't surprised that the game was very successful and that it was well received, but I was surprised by the extent to which it was. It was a massive hit and there were all sorts of stories about people buying Amigas to play it on, which I never quite believed. It wasn't surprising that people wanted to get that game on their machine, because one thing it did was push the Amiga very, very hard. It also completely ignored the limitations of any other machine. In fact, if anything, it showed up the limitations of other machines.

I don't know why [Psygnosis] even bothered doing half the conversions they did, to be honest. Well I do, it was commercial pressure. We only were involved with the Amiga version and helped a local guy creating the version for the Atari Lynx handheld.

That's funny as it's actually one of the better conversions.
It was a nice machine. It had good scrolling and nice zooming abilities, so



» [Amiga] *Shadow Of The Beast* spawned two sequels and a large number of ports.

I was happy to be involved with that. But when they started talking about Spectrum versions it was just 'why?!'. The strong thing about *SOTB* isn't the game, it's the graphics and the sound. There were 13 versions, I believe, and only one or two of them were justified from a technical or gameplay point of view.

Reflections formed a very strong relationship with Psygnosis. How did this come about?
What we did, both on the BBC and the Amiga and ST, was to approach what we thought was the best publisher at the time for those platforms. We already had a strong interest in Psygnosis's products. They came in this cool black box with Roger Dean artwork. They were oversized boxes as well, so they really stood out. And the quality of the materials they used, it was just like opening something quite nice. I always got quite excited about a new Psygnosis game, so for me when we had *Ballistix* up and running and were starting to play around with the



* FIVE TO PLAY

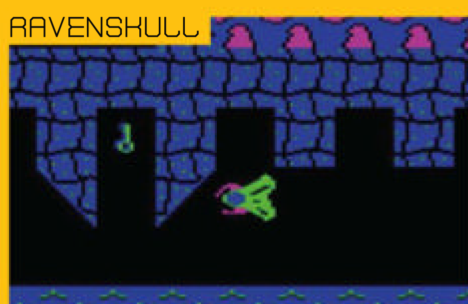
The essential games of Martin Edmondson

DRIVER



INSPIRED BY CLASSIC car chase movies of the Sixties and Seventies, *Driver* pushed the powers of the PlayStation like no game before. It offered gamers four large open-world cities to tear around in (Miami, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York), exaggerated car physics, varied missions and a cinematic story about an ex-race car driver turned undercover cop who uses his skills to infiltrate a powerful crime syndicate. All this was complemented by stunning visuals and an addictive Film Director mode, which allowed players to shoot and edit their very own car mini-chase scenes. *Driver* was arguably the most unique and technically impressive racer of the 32-bit era, and its success helped sow the seeds of the modern sandbox game.

RAVENSKULL



RAVENSKULL WAS MARTIN'S first published game. Written for the BBC Micro, it was a top-down exploration game that he co-wrote with his school chum Nicholas Chamberlain and was published by Superior Software, one of the biggest publishers of BBC Micro software at the time. It has all the hallmarks of a classic Martin Edmondson game – hard as hell, but soft on the eyes. Players could select between controlling an Elf, Wizard, Warrior or Adventurer to explore the labyrinthine layout of Castle Ravenskull, avoiding enemies and finding keys as they did so. With colourful crisp visuals, lovely big stages to explore and smooth scrolling – it ran at a 30 frames per second – it's certainly an impressive gaming debut.

SHADOW OF THE BEAST



MARTIN IS AWARE of *Shadow Of The Beast*'s failings as a videogame, openly admitting that it started life as a technical demo to show off what the Amiga could do before transforming into a full game. Inspired by the technology of arcade games and the artwork of popular fantasy artists Roger Dean and Rodney Matthews, *Shadow Of The Beast* raised the bar for Amiga visuals. Psygnosis invested heavily in the game at the time, and with the firm's backing it became a massive hit and put Reflections on the map – cementing the studio's relationship with the publisher and the Amiga. Owing to its success, *SOTB* was ported to pretty much every machine under the sun, including 8-bits like the ZX Spectrum. It also went on to spawn two sequels.

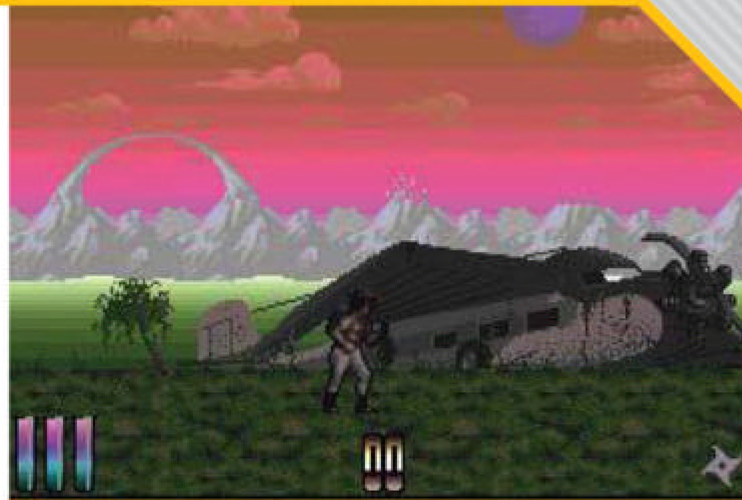
scrolling system for *SOTB*, Psygnosis was the number-one publisher that I wanted to approach. And of course, because of the style of the artwork, already quite attuned to that whole Roger Dean/Rodney Matthews style, it almost had that feel of a Psygnosis game anyway.

How important was Psygnosis to Reflections' success?
Massively, if we'd put *SOTB* with some other publisher, who knows how successful it would have been. When Psygnosis published *SOTB*… they put a lot of money behind it, but they also put a lot of resources in terms of interesting ideas and marketing. It was the right game with the right publisher on a machine that had people absolutely clamouring for a game that would really show off what it could do.

Why did you decide not to make the jump to games consoles and instead stick it out with the Amiga during the 16-bit era, particularly when piracy was so rife?
It's an interesting question. People had been burned previously on the consoles, so there was a bit of distrust of that. What tended to happen on consoles, and this didn't always happen, is the platform holder would strongly push their own products, and that worried me a little bit. But also, we had established a brand, and anyone with an Amiga was aware of us. There was also perhaps a bit of laziness there as well, because once you understand a machine inside out and you know how to push it hard, then the idea of swapping to another machine and trying to get the best out of it is a new challenge. At the time we were just happy to push the Amiga and push the *SOTB* brand with the marketing help that we had from Psygnosis.

Was Reflections affected by piracy?

Oh massively. That was the nail in the coffin. That was the reason we abandoned the Amiga in the end. You could just see that the sales were going down. They used to quote figures like 96 or 97% of the games of the versions floating around were pirated.



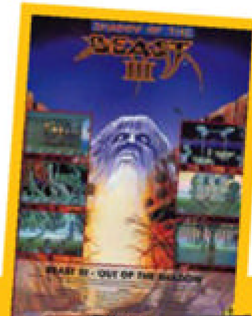
» [Amiga] *Shadow Of The Beast III* is considered by many fans to be the best designed in the series.

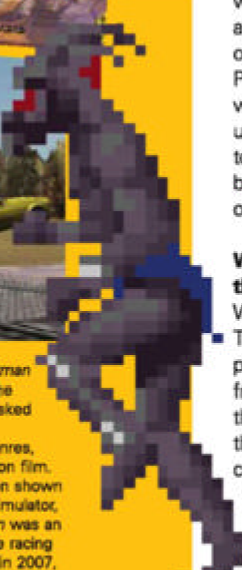
These days *Driver* is probably Reflections' most recognised game franchise. When did you come up with the concept?
I started designing *Driver* in a very rudimentary form for the Amiga. It's a funny way how *Driver* came about, but it started out as a top-down game. I actually drew a lot of the graphics for it as well. The approach was similar to the very first *GTA*, but the game wasn't going to be anything like *GTA* (I'm not sort of saying I thought of *GTA* before DMA Design did), it was just the graphical approach and top-down look. But what I decided was the idea of being this cop patrolling this city and chasing after bad guys would be better suited to a 3D environment, so the idea was just shelved until a later date.

Reflections did eventually make the jump to consoles with the PlayStation. Did Psygnosis's heavy backing of the console influence that decision?
Yes, it was a good decision for us. Psygnosis were heavily involved in secret behind-the-scenes stuff on the PlayStation, and it was all very exciting. I remember being one of the first to see the first development kits, the size of a photocopier with wires hanging out. That was a really exciting time to be involved with videogames because you could see that this was going to transform the types of games that you could play. PCs had been experimenting with 3D, but it was nowhere near as easy or as clean as the potential offered by the PlayStation. And since Psygnosis were right in there with it, we had the opportunity if we came up with a good enough game design to get early access to those kits and be involved in that exciting ramp-up of PlayStation.

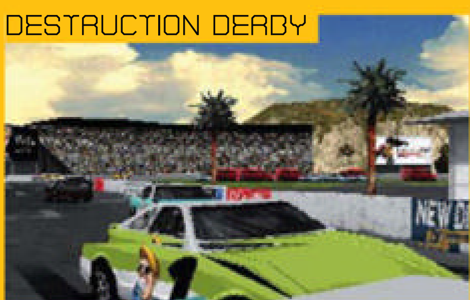
What was your first impression of the machine?
Well the dev kits were massive. They were the size of an old photocopier and they also had a fraction of the performance of the final machine, because of all these buses and wires between components and circuit boards were slowing everything down and things were underclocked to keep the heat down. The best thing about the PlayStation was how

> "Looking back, Reflections probably wasn't a brilliant name. Even now sometimes it just reminds me of a hairdressers"





DESTRUCTION DERBY



AS A CHILD Martin enjoyed watching banger races with his dad and brother and would often wait until after the main event to study the crumpled cars in detail. This fascination with destruction would form the main inspiration for *Destruction Derby*, a game concept that Martin finally got to realise when he learned that the graphical power of the PlayStation could do it justice. Stunning visuals and physics resulted in the most harsh and satisfying car collisions yet seen in a videogame, and the game became an early PlayStation hit. Reflections' last game in the series was 1996's *Destruction Derby 2*, while the last two games were developed Studio 33, which was once a part of Psygnosis but is now owned by Electronic Arts.

STUNTMAN



REFLECTIONS' MOST POLARISING racing game, *Stuntman* saw the studio tackle a new area. As its title implies, the game put players in the role of a movie stuntman. It tasked them with completing a series of stunt-peppered race sequences for movies that spoofed well-known film genres, from a British gangster flick to a James Bond-style action film. Once each sequence was completed, players were then shown a replay of their actions cut to a theatrical trailer. Part simulator, part construction game and part racing game, *Stuntman* was an ambitious and multifaceted title that still offers a unique racing experience today. Its sequel *Stuntman: Ignition* arrived in 2007, developed by Paradigm Entertainment and published by THQ.





» Martin returned to the *Driver* series for *Driver: San Francisco*. He worked as a consultant on the game. See if you can spot him in this team shot.

easy it was to program – because when we got our development kit, within 24 hours we had a textured polygon rotating on the screen and then within another day we had a fully modelled car, which is pretty impressive for a piece of kit like that. Now compare that to something like the PS2 and PS3 where we virtually didn't have a pixel on the screen for months, that first machine was great for a game developer.

> "It became a bit of fascination for me trying to do what arcade games were doing with vastly more superior hardware on home computers"

Did the PlayStation make the transition from 2D to 3D game development more straightforward for you?
Yes, I absolutely loved it. *Destruction Derby* was born out of a childhood obsession with destruction derby. My dad used to take myself and my brother to them when we were little kids and I used to hop over the barrier when the race was over and go and examine all the damage. I had this really weird fascination with crashing cars. So for me you can't get that sort of satisfaction from a 2D game, but when you get really realistic 3D graphics then it becomes really exciting. I had this whole thing planned out where we were going to do a game based on destruction derbies, banger racing and stock car racing, and the PlayStation was powerful enough to do it.

So why didn't you decide to do *Driver* first? Was there anything holding you back?
The thing that really inspired *Driver*, exactly as you saw in the final game, was actually the figure-of-eight track that we built in *Destruction Derby*, and stopping the car in the crossroads of this figure-of-eight and wondering wouldn't it be great if we had traffic lights here and this was a junction and these were all pedestrians whizzing past, and you could just sit here and watch the world go by. That's what inspired me to do *Driver* in the form that you finally saw the game.

***Driver 2* introduced on-foot sections to the series. Was this something you wanted to incorporate in the first game?**
It was just a natural progression really because he was a cop, and there were cut-scenes in the first game. It was never planned that you could get out of the car in *Driver 1*. I mean we never built that into the design or built any graphics or geometry to allow that to happen. We thought it was enough of a push to get the PlayStation to do what it was doing. So that was the next logical step really, to get the character to swap cars. It was a nice natural way of doing it that would make you feel involved. But it was very simple; I mean *GTA III* came out a year or so after that and obviously took it to massively greater levels.

What was your impression of *GTA III* when you saw it? Did you feel you'd have to do something dramatic with *Driver* to compete?
I suppose so. I was certainly impressed. I wasn't impressed with the graphics, but I was very impressed with the story, the scale, the writing, and the cut-scenes. There was a million and one things that were brilliant about it. And because of the scale of it, it didn't really worry me too much at first because I thought *Driver* is really about driving and it should focus on driving. In *GTA III* driving was more a means to an end, for getting from A to B, as most of the action was on foot. So it didn't worry us too much, until people really started demanding that you could do more out of the car.

So… *Driver*'s infamous garage tutorial stage and final mission. Why were they so hard?
I didn't intend the garage tutorial to be difficult and I didn't actually think it was that difficult. Of course, when you look back on it now that's ridiculous. It was supposed to be challenging, and I think the silly decision looking back on it now, although it's become so well known that it's probably become the right decision, was the fact that you couldn't progress with the game and the story until you'd aced it. In modern game design you'd never do that, you'd have some way of skipping it at least. But anyway, that's the decision I'd made. I thought I'd made it easy enough because I could do it in 23 seconds, so the thinking was if we give people almost three times that amount of time then it must be easy mustn't it?, completely forgetting the fact that a developer of the game knows it at such a detailed level that they can maximise everything and that they are so far ahead of the curve when it comes to the skill level or someone who had just bought the game. I wasn't so worried about the final mission. You got that far, you've had your money's worth, you've had a good time, let's give them something that is just so difficult but it must be achievable. And I'm still happy with that, I'm happy with that because you're talking about it now. People talk



» [PlayStation] Martin originally planned to write *Driver* for the Amiga. Luckily, he waited.

about that mission, they talk about the garage. So that for me means the decisions were correct. [He laughs.]

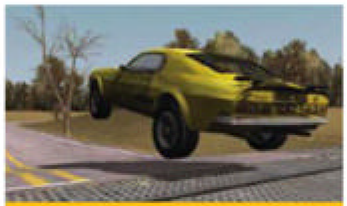
When did your brother Gareth join Reflections and how did your relationship work?
Gareth joined as we were coming towards the end of *Driver 1*, and he came from the telecoms industry, actually building the infrastructure of the towers that supported phone companies when they were building all these things. So actually his main skill was project management and delivering to tight schedules and that was some of the stuff I was very bad at because I was just very creative and wanted to make games. But he came on board and the idea was to have him help with the production process and getting things out on time. And he actually stayed on at Reflections after I left. When I sold Reflections and had a five-year earn-out agreement, I sort of retired at the end of that and then he took over as studio manager, until he left at the end of year before last and came and joined me at Thumbstar.

Was there less autonomy at Reflections after it was sold?
No, not at all. There was just as much autonomy. We were left to get on with the games. The problems only really came when money became an issue and the company started getting into financial difficulty. Also, when you have a situation where a game has to be delivered by a certain date, not because there is marketing, a brand or movie hinging on it, but because a company has to hit its end-of-year results and that date becomes a hard date that cannot move no matter what. That's when the difficulties come.

You said that the PS2 wasn't as simple as the PS1 to create games for and deadlines were becoming stricter. Did these factors affect the development of *Driv3r*?
Well it certainly [meant] more testing because you've got a combination of a much more ambitious game, hardware that is much more difficult to program and get the best out of it, and that's exacerbated by all the



» [PlayStation] *Destruction Derby* was inspired by Martin's love of banger racing growing up.



» [Xbox] *Stuntman* was another original racing game by Reflections.

pre-release stuff about PS2 and about how much more powerful it was than PS1. But then the reality is that… it is only as powerful as that on paper, and getting the best out of the machine is much more difficult than has originally been understood. So you have that, and deadlines that are not movable. They all conspire. We took longer than we should have done to create the game, and had to leave bits of it and not spend as much time focused on them as we wanted to because we had to get the game out for this absolute hard deadline.

Tell us more about the challenges that Reflections faced.
It was like writing two games, because on-foot stuff and shooting [is] not insignificant and to get it right is a lot of work and also takes experience. If somebody gives us a car project and tells us to make this the best car chasing or car racing game then this is right in our territory. But then if you say also you've got to get out of the car, run around and fire guns and solve puzzles and jump and kick and fight, all this stuff is okay but again it's the backdrop of everything else and we just run out of deadlines. You can tell the out-of-car sections in *Driv3r* are not finished because they weren't finished. It's unfortunate that we didn't spend as much time as we wanted to on them, but to be fair to the publisher, we had already spent a lot of time on the project. As the developer we have to take our share of the blame as well.

Did you still follow the studio and *Driver* after leaving?
Yes I did. I watched the next one with interest, but obviously there are confidentialities there. I wasn't aware of what was going on with *Driver 4*, I just hoped they would be afforded the time to improve the on-foot sections and make it a better game. I went off and co-founded Thumbstar Games with some other guys from the mobile phone gaming industry, and I did actually semi-retire for six months… I just did all that travelling that many students do that I didn't have the time to do.

✱ YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Burning questions from members of our forum

Was there ever a 3D version of *Shadow Of The Beast* planned and do you think it would have worked?
There was never a 3D version of *SOTB* planned or designed, but I have been asked many times about this. The problem now is that for it to be really successful (beyond the hardcore fans of the original) it would have to compete with the likes of *God Of War*. It would be a brave man that took on that challenge!

How do you feel about the current state of *Destruction Derby*?
I'm sure people enjoyed some of the later games, but personally I became disappointed with later instalments of *Destruction Derby* as they lost the real-world basis (British 'banger racing') that the original was loosely based on. I haven't seen a *Destruction Derby* game for a long, long time now, though, so I'm not up to speed on the latest *DD* game.



Whose idea was it to pack a T-shirt with *SOTB*?
That was Pygnosis's idea. And the huge box. Basically Ian and Jonathan, who ran Psygnosis at the time, were excited about the potential for the game and wanted to give it a huge marketing push. This is one thing that certainly stood out from the crowd. Must have been a nightmare for the retailers, though!

Are there any games you've played that have made you think: 'I wish I'd thought of that first?'
Candy Crush!

Why didn't David Whittaker return to write the music for *SOTB II* & *III*?
I can't really remember, but I think he was probably completely sick of me by the end of *Shadow Of The Beast 1*!! David had done a lot of music for previous Psygnosis games like *Obliterator* and he liked to use a set of samples that he had already in place. The problem, however, was that those samples were of relatively low audio quality (but extremely efficient on memory). I was after a much more high-end Fairlight-type sound and was willing to trade off memory resource for that. I think I drove him mad with constant requests for particular instruments to be sampled, and music style guides etc! He did a great job though, obviously. The music for the next game was handled by Tim Wright.





Stop The Express

SPY TRAINING

RETROREVIVAL



» HUDSON SOFT
» ZX SPECTRUM
» 1983

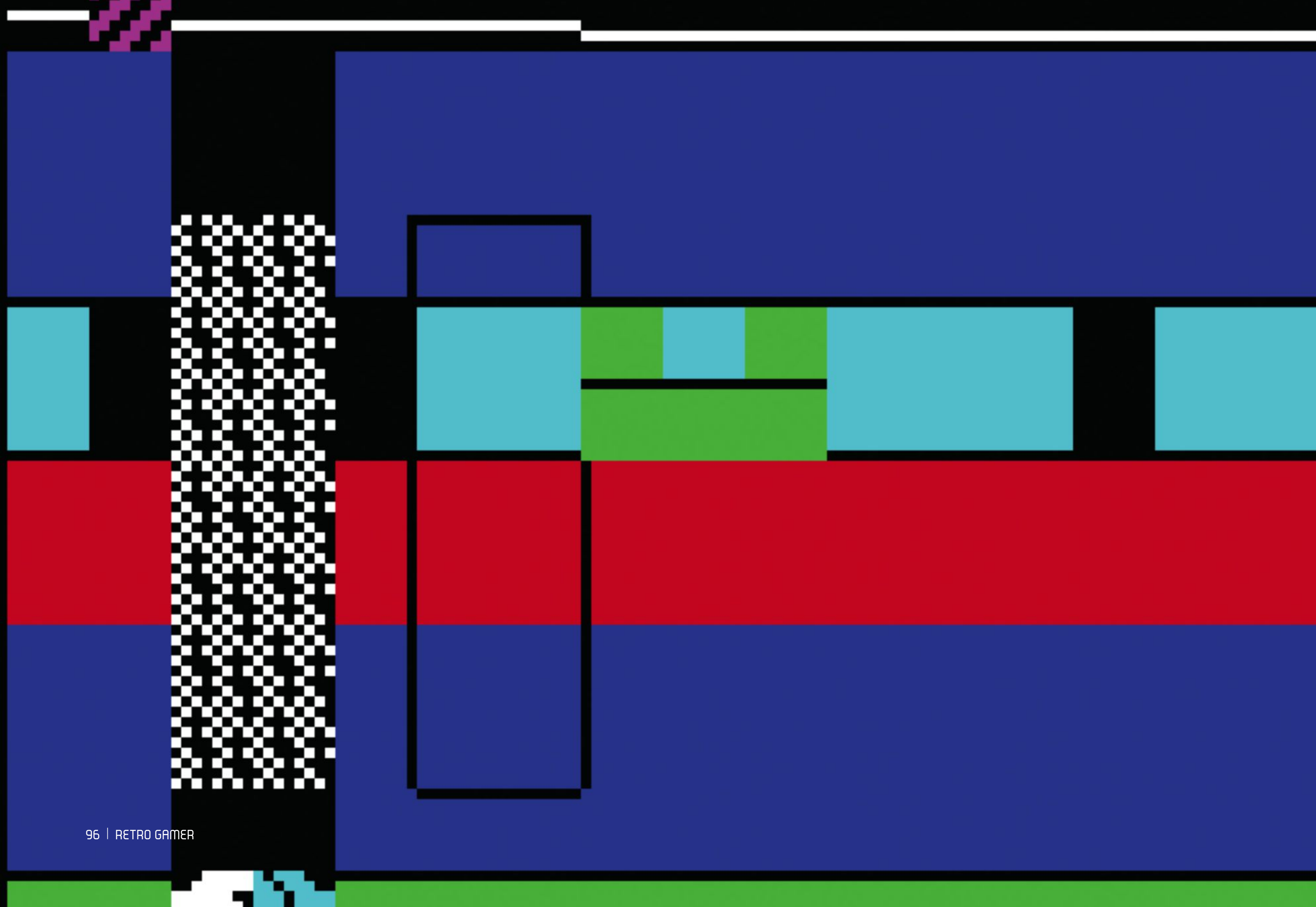
The ZX Spectrum has many great games that showed the impressive things it could do in the right hands, and *Stop The Express* is one such example. Developed by Hudson Soft and published in the UK by Sinclair Research, this is as close to an arcade experience as you could hope for on the Speccy (though it was later released for the C64 and MSX). With its simple Hollywood premise – explained quite tidily in the game's intro – and its lovely chunky visuals, *Stop The Express* is a cracking little game that has a timeless and addictive quality. And if you've never played it, then you are missing out on one of the Spectrum's more entertaining action titles.

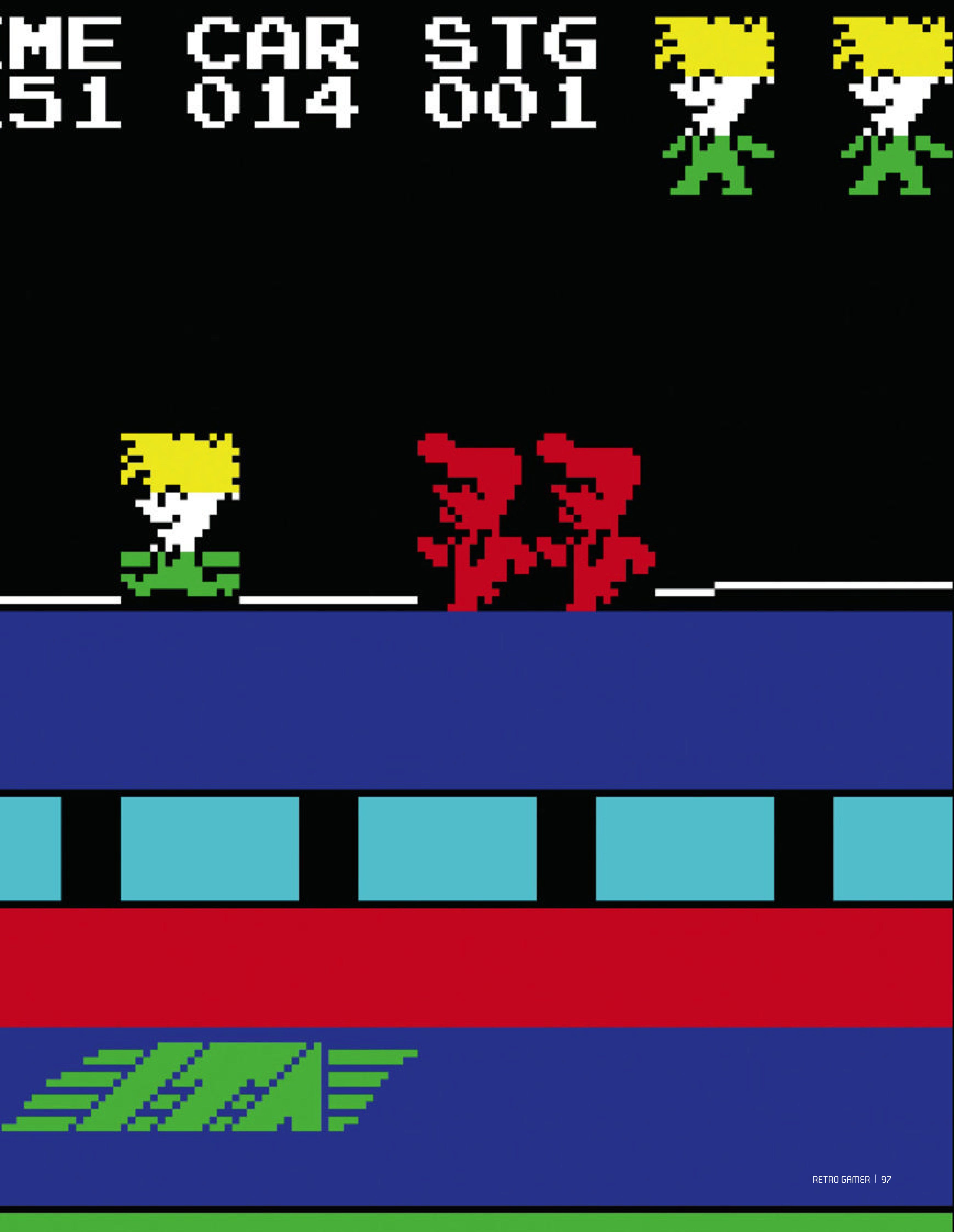
For the unfamiliar, you play a young scruffy-haired secret agent whose mission it is to stop a speeding train which has been captured by the evil Redman – a group of pompadour-haired gangster/terrorist types who are fleeing over the border to evade arrest.

This mission is divided into two parts. The first takes place on the roof of the train and sees our hero carriage hopping and mail-catcher dodging to get to the middle of the train before time runs out. With his precarious route blocked by knife-throwing gangsters, his only method of attack is to pluck 'snake birds' from the sky and use them as an amusing feathered projectile to knock his aggressors from the train. It's not the conventional method of battling gangsters, but it gets the job done.

Once halfway, the action then moves to the interior, displaying the action via a neat cutaway of the train. In this section the objective remains the same as before. However, this time you must jump and use the passenger handlebars to dodge the Redman goons and their knife attacks. Making this section extra tricky, though, is something that looks like an alien ghost which haunts the handrails. Successfully reach the end of this section and the final screen sees you trying to retrieve a key to the train's control room. Grab the key and you will stop the express.

With its impressive visuals, slick presentation and addictive gameplay, *Stop The Express* is a fun, entertaining and well-presented action game. *



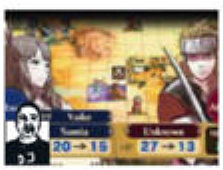

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RETRORATED



>> They say variety is the spice of life, so we've taken a look at a variety of different things this month. We give our verdict on the Neo Geo X, listen to a CD of remixed Amiga tunes and get all strategic with Fire Emblem: Awakening and Age Of Empires II HD

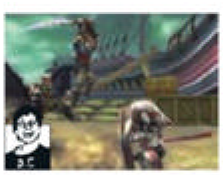
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Fire Emblem: Awakening
An excellent strategy game with interesting new gameplay mechanics and a truly gripping storyline.



STUART
Dead Or Alive 5+
A solid fighter that loses out to its bigger brother, but still manages to pack quite a punch.



DAVID
Fire Emblem: Awakening
I've always had a soft spot for this delightful series, and *Awakening* proves to be the best yet.



» The actual joystick is a solid representation of the original one. It does feel a little lightweight, though, so watch those fighting games.

SNK PLAYMORE'S CONSOLE PROMISES MUCH, BUT DELIVERS LITTLE

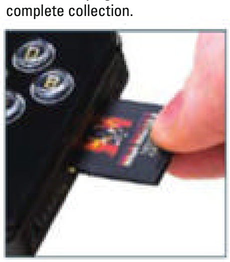
Neo Geo X Gold Limited Edition

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** N/A
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £175
- » **PUBLISHER:** PQUBE/ BLAZE
- » **DEVELOPER:** TOMMO
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» The Neo Geo was first released in 1990 and immediately drew attention due to its fantastic visuals, which were identical to the arcade versions. The machine itself was extremely expensive, with a 'Gold' version costing $650 at launch. The machine has gone on to become extremely popular with collectors who will spend thousands trying to amass a complete collection.



» SD cards are the format of choice. Additional cards will be available soon with multiple games on them.



Ever since the Neo Geo X Gold was announced we've had high hopes for it. After all, it's an officially licensed piece of new hardware from SNK Playmore and many recent Neo Geo projects such as Neo Geo Station have been excellent.

Sadly, now that we've finally received a test unit, our excitement has been massively tempered by cold hard reality. The Neo Geo X Gold isn't a poor machine, but it could have been a lot better.

Things start off very promisingly, as the box is extremely lavish, easily replicating the styling of the original machine. There's something rather exciting about seeing the Neo Geo face logo appearing on hardware packaging again and it promises a quality that the Neo Geo X never really lives up to.

The handheld has a rather nice look and feel – mainly due to the pad, which is very solid and easily allows you to pull off very special moves in the many fighting games that come packaged with the machine. The pad does make very loud clicking noises, though, and it wasn't long before people in the office were complaining about the noise (it really is that loud). The main face buttons are also solid and well built, being very responsive and feeling extremely durable. The same can be said for the overall build of the handheld itself. It doesn't feel cheap and nasty to hold and there are plenty of options on it, which range from volume and brightness controls to HDMI output and AV out. An SD card slot is also included, enabling you to play other games on the system. *Ninja Warriors* is already included with the Gold Limited Edition model, but SNK Playmore is promising additional packs which will include three games for £19.99.

Unfortunately, the LCD screen is a disappointment that doesn't match the quality of the rest of the device. The biggest issue with it is that everything looks washed out and dull. Neo Geo games look wonderfully vibrant on their home system, and the low-quality screen fails to capture



» [Neo Geo] *Metal Slug* remains one of the best games in the Neo Geo canon and it has lost none of its charm since its original release.





» [Neo Geo] The low resolution of the screen is particularly noticeable when games use scaling effects.

GO DEEPER

>> The original Neo Geo was first released in 1990 and was eventually discontinued by SNK in 1997.

>> One of the big draws of the machine was that its games were identical to the arcade versions. The caveat however was high game prices, with a starting price of $200.

>> The home market for Neo Geo games is extremely expensive, with certain titles fetching thousands of pounds.



Incoming releases

SNK Playmore is planning several additional game packs for the machine, available on special cards soon. *Neo Geo X Classics Vol 1* will include *Metal Slug 2*, *Sengoku* and *Top Hunter!*, while *Vol 2* has *Samurai Shodown 3*, *Savage Reign* and *Super Sidekicks 3*. *The King Of Fighters '96*, *Blazing Star* and *Kizuna Encounter!* will be available on *Vol 3*, while *Vol 4* (easily our favourite) will feature *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, *Shock Troopers* and *World Heroes 2: Jet*. Last but by no means least is *Vol 5*, which contains *Breaker's Revenge*, *Art Of Fighting 3* and *The Last Blade*.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
NEO GEO CONSOLE



▼ SOMETHING NEW
NEO GEO STATION (PS3)



this. The aspect ratio of the display is also confusing, at 16:9 (no doubt to match more recent systems like the PSP and Vita) when Neo Geo games use 4:3. You can switch between different aspect ratios, but it still feels like a pointless addition. The screen fidelity is poor and you have to get it in the sweet spot or it's either too dark or light to look at. Battery life is also rather average, giving around four hours off a single charge, although it does recharge quickly.

Things are little better when you connect to a TV. The HDMI output is extremely poor, outputting to 480p and delivering an image that looks extremely muddy and fuzzy. There's little definition to the pixels, and titles and words look poorly defined on the screen. Other concerns are the amount of screen tearing that appears in certain games. Games like *Super Sidekicks* constantly tear when you're playing. It doesn't make the game unplayable, of course, but it's an annoyance that simply doesn't need to be there. Outputting via component produces additional problems like blooming and colour bleed. Considering how good the output of the original Neo Geo could be, it's a real shame that creator Tommo has been unable to replicate this.

A docking system and joystick are also included with the Limited Edition pack, and they do a great job of capturing the nostalgia of the original machine. The docking station takes the form of an AES and is relatively easy to open. It's a little stiff to fit the handheld inside, but once done it can be easily connected to a TV via the same outputs that are found on the handheld. The joystick is a good representation of the original, but feels a little too flimsy. We're not to sure how long it would last in the long haul, and replacements (or an additional stick for two-player games) aren't cheap, weighing in at £50 a pop.

That leaves us with the 21 included games (*Ninja Warriors* is currently being given away as a launch incentive) and the actual emulation of the device. The good news is that the selection of games is very decent, covering a wide range of genres and featuring obvious classics like *Metal Slug*, *Real Bout: Fatal Fury Special*, *Last Resort*, *Nam-1975* and *Samurai Shodown II*. The emulation, however, isn't quite so hot and, in addition to the screen tearing, there are occasional sound issues and odd bits of slowdown. Considering the quality of emulation found on SNK Playmore's Neo Geo Station catalogue, this is nowhere near the same standard and becomes hard to justify at the high asking price.

As much as we like the idea of the Neo Geo X Gold, everything about it screams missed opportunity. If it was £100 cheaper it might be easier to recommend, but as it stands there are far cheaper alternatives for playing a slice of Neo Geo history.

In a nutshell

Despite some nice packaging and well-built hardware, the poor screen quality and lacklustre emulation really let this device down. A missed opportunity of epic proportions.



OPINION

There are good aspects to the Neo Geo X, but it does feel like a missed opportunity. The concept is sound with a decent selection of games, but niggling aspects mar the overall experience. The visuals don't look crisp and vibrant enough, and the emulation could be better – shame for a console where quality was such a hallmark.

Stuart Hunt



» [Neo Geo] It's fuzzier than you remember, but there's no denying that *Nam-1975* is still great fun to play.

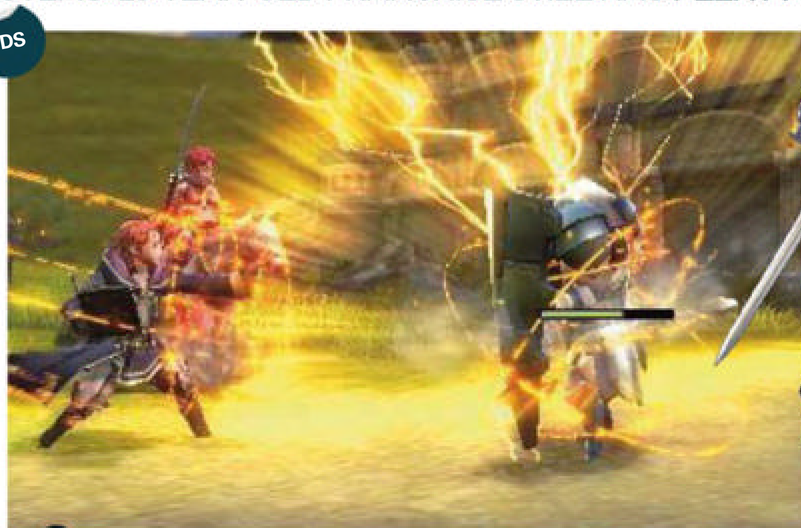


» Although the device itself is nice to hold and feels durable, it's let down by a poor screen that suffers from a washed out image and poor viewing angles.

>> FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

Fire Emblem: Awakening

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS' 23-YEAR-OLD FRANCHISE STILL HAS PLENTY OF LIFE





» [3DS] Pairing up characters massively enhances their abilities and also looks cool in the animated battles.

INFORMATION

3DS

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» The first *Fire Emblem* game was released in Japan for the Famicom in 1990. The series stayed exclusive to Japan until the release of *Fire Emblem* in 2003 for Game Boy Advance. *Fire Emblem: Awakening* is the 11th game in the popular series and the first to be released on 3DS.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Fire Emblem: Awakening

>> Intelligent Systems, the creator of Fire Emblem, also makes the excellent *Advance Wars* series.

>> The original *Fire Emblem* has been remade twice – once on the Super Famicom and, more recently, for the DS where it was known as *Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon*.

>> Online play is once again available and proves to be very stable.





For those unaware, *Fire Emblem* is a turn-based strategy game in the vein of *Advance Wars*. It's also an exceptionally brilliant series that offers easy-to-understand instructions with satisfyingly deep gameplay.

Awakening follows this formula but introduces a number of interesting new mechanics. Relationship building is the biggest and most important and can be done in a number of ways. Certain characters produce a little heart when placed next to each other, which in turn will slowly boost stats, offer the opportunity of an extra attack from them, or even let them deflect killing blows that were meant for their partner. It's a lovely touch, and becomes even more relevant when you realise that characters can get married off and spawn children who will eventually fight for you.

Choice has always been important in the series and *Awakening* is no different. There are a huge number of characters to recruit over the game's 26 chapters, as well as plenty of interesting side missions (even more if you opt for the additional premium DLC). Characters can be paired to enhance their abilities on the battlefield and occasionally support each other; you can use Seals to change heroes into even more powerful classes (of which there are over 40 to discover); while the world map can be constantly returned to in order to visit shops, or participate in additional battles if grinding is your thing.

Another benefit of *Awakening* is its excellent localisation that transforms the otherwise generic story into something far more entertaining. This is mainly due to the well-fleshed-out characters that range from a preening archer to an overly protective knight who slowly learns to stop smothering the very royalty he's protecting. Beautiful cutscenes and new gameplay sections – like the Barracks that allow you to listen in on certain characters, which in turn introduces new story threads – further enhance *Awakening*'s engaging story.

And then of course there's the continuation of permadeath (which can be turned off), which continues to fuel your desire to keep each character alive in a way that few other games can manage. Add in some extremely lavish presentation and a slew of tweakable battle options and the end result is the best *Fire Emblem* yet.

OPINION



Another solid and polished entry in the *Fire Emblem* series which captures all the magic that the tactical RPG series has become so popular for. Fans won't be disappointed and it's accessible enough to attract new gamers as well. Miss it at your peril…

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

The new relationships are superb, effortlessly building on *Awakening*'s already polished gameplay. A solid sequel from Intelligent Systems and the best game in the series by far.

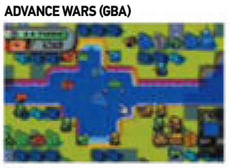
>> **Score 93%**

retro GAMER SIZZLER

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

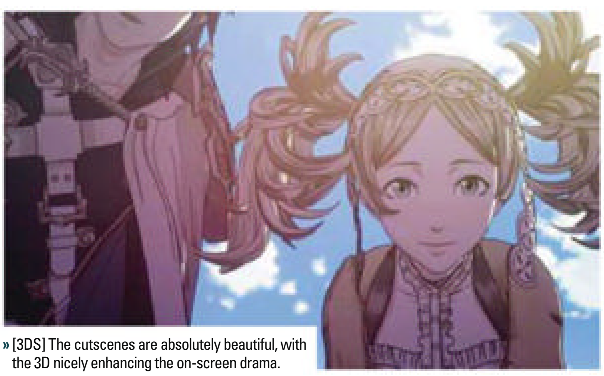
ADVANCE WARS (GBA)



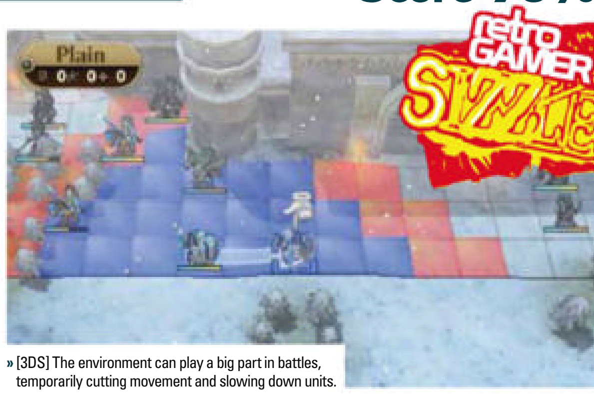
▼ SOMETHING NEW

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2 (DS)





» [3DS] The cutscenes are absolutely beautiful, with the 3D nicely enhancing the on-screen drama.



» [3DS] The environment can play a big part in battles, temporarily cutting movement and slowing down units.

Dead Or Alive 5+

TECMO'S RISQUÉ FIGHTER GOES PORTABLE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** TECMO KOEI » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM NINJA » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



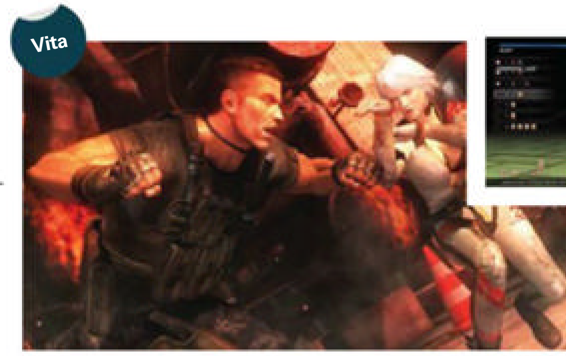
>> The fifth instalment of Tecmo's popular fighting franchise appeared last year on Xbox 360 and PS3 and jolly good fun it was too. Team Ninja has now ported the game to Sony's Vita (which is becoming something of a magnet for excellent beat-'em-up conversions) and the end results are very good indeed.

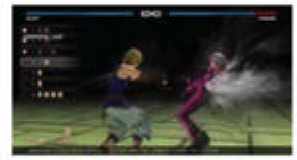
First off, it's worth pointing out that there are concessions with this adaptation. The graphics, while very good, don't quite match those of the home version, featuring reduced character resolution and a distinct lack of destructible elements. Fortunately, it still looks lovely on the Vita's screen, while the whole thing plays at a lovely, nippy 60 fps.

All the modes from the original game have been included as well, meaning you get an enjoyable (if rather baffling) story mode; 'Fight', which includes Versus, Arcade, Time Attack and Survival modes; and substantial online and training modes. New Vita-exclusive modes range from specific move challenges for each character, to the brand new touch-based Touch Fight, which is as rubbish and awkward as it sounds.

The PS Vita enhancements add little to the core package, so it's fortunate that package is so good. Team Ninja worked closely with Sega's *Virtua Fighter* team (Akira Yuhi, Sarah Bryant and Pai Chan feature as playable characters) and the end result is a brawler that feels far more deliberately paced; building on the mechanics of *Dead Or Alive 4*, but introducing new tricks like the Power Blow, which delivers a devastating attack if your health drops below 50 per cent. A solid adaptation of a highly enjoyable fighter.

>> Score **75%**





» [PS Vita] *DOA5* introduces two new fighters: Rig, a Canadian master of Taekwondo, and Mila, who uses the MMA fighting style.

» [PS Vita] While enjoyable, it's not had a massive overhaul.



Paula Agnus Denise – Best Of Amiga And CD32 Video Game Music

YOUR EARS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** CD » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** ITUNES, AMAZON MP3 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** $9.99 » **PUBLISHER:** 010101 MUSIC » **DEVELOPER:** VARIOUS » **PLAYERS:** N/A



>> Fans of Commodore's Amiga are going to adore this CD, as it's a fitting tribute to the popular 16-bit computer. Published by Dutch independent label 010101 Music, it's an eclectic selection of original and remixed tunes, by some of the best artists in the industry.

Cold Storage, Ramon Braumeller, Allister Brimble, Chris Huelsbeck and Bomb The Bass are just a few of the artists involved, and over half of the 19 included songs have been completely remixed (although only five of the tracks are completely new compositions). *Hired Guns*, the *Shadow Of The Beast* trilogy, *Alien Breed*, *Turrican 2* and *3* and *Xenon II: Megablast* are just a few of the featured game soundtracks, making it just as much a highlight of the system's best games as an essential compilation of unforgettable tunes.

Key tracks include two offerings from Synchaoz, which consist of an amazingly moody rendition of *Cannon Fodder*'s Narcissus and the dynamic medley he's composed for *Hired Guns*. Special mention must also go to Danja & Martine's beautiful acoustic rendition of the *Agony* theme tune. It's a wonderfully melancholic track that perfectly captures Tim Wright's original piece. Wright himself contributes to the album with a fantastic pan-pipes-fuelled Oxygene Moon Mix of *Shadow Of The Beast 2*'s Title sequence, and an Urban Slide Mix of the third game's classic Game Over sequence.

The whole package is finished off with a 12-page booklet that features information and screenshots for the featured games. It's a shame that only five of the 19 songs are completely brand new, but there's no denying that *Paula Agnus Denise* is an aural delight that features a solid range of excellent compositions. Highly recommended.

>> Score **87%**



» The name *Paula Agnus Denise* is taken from the three custom chips that powered the Amiga.

RETROROUND-UP



» Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH



INFORMATION
» System: PC
» Buy it for: £14.99
» Buy it from: www.steampowered.com
» Score: 80%

Age Of Empires II HD

This classic RTS, first released in 1999, is widely regarded to be one of the best games in the popular series. Developer Hidden Path has decided that more gamers need to experience it, recently releasing an enhanced high-definition version on Steam.

The biggest improvement is with the graphics, which have now been updated for modern systems. It allows you to appreciate just how intricate the design of the original game was; and while the new visuals aren't spectacular, they remain a big improvement over those of the original. Interestingly, better high-definition graphic options are available via Steam Workshop, but we'll get to that a little later.

The multiplayer aspect has also received plenty of attention from Hidden Path and while it's far from perfect – there were numerous issues that the developer has been working on since launch – being able to create matches over Steam is a massive improvement over the current alternatives available for the original game. And *Age Of Empires II* really comes alive in multiplayer mode, allowing you to build up huge armies to crush your opponents. It's frustrating that it retains the same lag issues that were found in the original game, but there's no denying its addictive qualities and the general superiority of the new matchmaking.

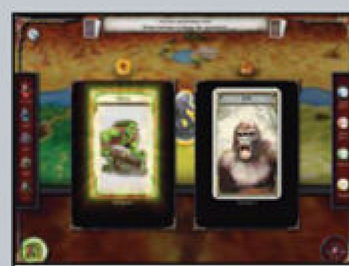
By far the biggest addition to *Age Of Empires II HD* is the inclusion of Steam Workshop, which adds massively to an already gigantic game. The original remains popular with modders, and there are already hundreds of new options, ranging from enhanced visual improvements to scenarios based on *Game Of Thrones*. Add in the fact that the main campaign is huge, and that it also includes the expansion *The Conquerers*, and *Age Of Empires'* longevity is assured.

» OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



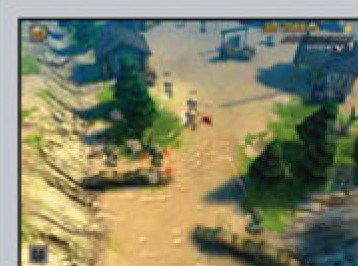
Shock Troopers 2nd Squad

» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Buy it for:** 900 Points
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console
» **Score:** 68%
» This is one ugly game, caught between the delightful cartoon visuals of the first game and the plasticky rendered style popular at the time. Mechanically it's a little disappointing too, dropping the multiple routes and ability to switch between characters in favour of more standard run-and-gun fare. It's nice charging around in vehicles, but some boring boss fights and dull weaponry make it inferior to the original.



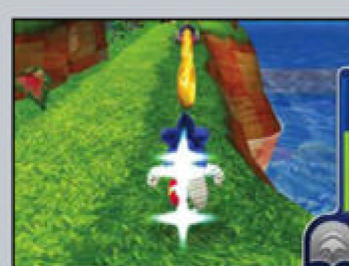
Talisman Prologue

» **System:** iOS (tested), Android
» **Buy it for:** £2.99
» **Buy it from:** App Store/Google Play
» **Score:** 78%
» After 30 years, the classic portable board game is now available in handheld form and it does a great job of capturing the essence of the original. There's no multiplayer yet (due in the summer), but still plenty of longevity thanks to 50 quests spread across ten different characters. Add in stunning presentation and easy-to-understand rules and *Talisman Prologue* proves to be a great strategy game.



Tiny Troopers 2: Special Ops

» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** £0.69 (IAP)
» **Buy it from:** App Store
» **Score:** 60%
» Chillingo's popular *Cannon Fodder* clone returns with a continued push on in-app purchases and a genuine lack of new ideas. A range of new weapons has been added and the ability to take cover with a downward swipe is a nice touch, yet it still feels far too similar to the first game. There are a few more items to collect this time around, but the mission structure is very linear. Solid but unspectacular.



Sonic Dash

» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** Free (IAP)
» **Buy it from:** App Store
» **Score:** 80%
» Sonic the Hedgehog turns up in a delightful *Temple Run* variant. The controls are nice and intuitive, with swipes and touches letting Sonic roll under hazards or home in on enemies, while the graphics are extremely slick and fast. While it does use in-app purchases to persuade you to pick up other characters or gain handy bonus starts, like *Pitfall* it's perfectly possible to enjoy the game without ever using them.

Double Dragon II: Wander Of The Dragons

» **System:** Xbox 360 » **Buy it for:** 800 Points » **Buy it from:** Xbox Live Arcade » **Score:** 24%

It's been three years since Gravity first announced its remake of *Double Dragon II*. It really wasn't worth the wait, as this is an atrocious videogame. *Double Dragon Neon* may not have been perfect, but at least it realised it had to move with the times, delivering plenty of slick special moves and gameplay mechanics (as well as a kick-ass soundtrack). *WOTD* simply lets you string together a few clumsy combos that feel clunky and awkward to use. There is a blocking system in place, with the ability to dash, but it adds little to the game.

AI is equally poor. Some enemies will politely wait until it's their turn to attack you, while others simply run on the spot, seemingly oblivious to your presence. It's an amazingly ropy game that isn't helped by ugly jerky visuals, repetitive music loops, a distinct lack of decent weapons, and an annoying stamina bar that depletes too quickly, allowing you to get easily overwhelmed. Avoid at all costs.



HOMEBREW

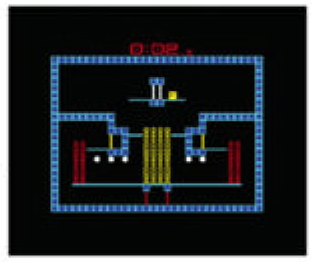
>> The scene's latest news and reviews



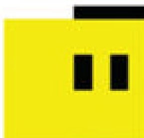
Developed by PhD student Michael Cook, ANGELINA is an artificial intelligence that creates games. What 'she' actually builds are at best average, but the processes involved are fascinating and there are moments of pure genius; she managed to work out VVVVVV-style gravity reversal mechanics without help and spent a few days not liking home secretary Theresa May much. Head over to http://gamesbyangelina.org/ for more info.

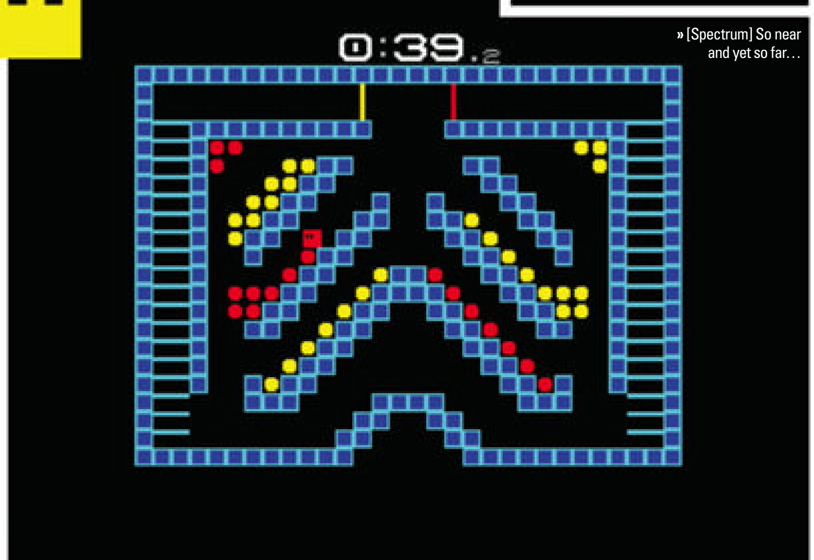
GEM CHASER

STRAIGHT FROM THE XBOX 360 TO THE SPECTRUM!



» [Spectrum] So near and yet so far…



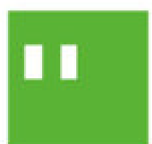


» [Spectrum] There on the stair.

G*em Chaser* is about a small coloured square with a couple of eyes who has a penchant for precious stones, which makes him the perfect geometric shape for the challenge at hand. Each stage of the game is a race against the clock to collect every gem and, of course, it wouldn't be particularly demanding if there wasn't more to it than just belting around the screen, grabbing objects. The real problem is that if a gem is collected that doesn't match the square's colour, it hinders rather than helps him by subtracting two seconds from the already frugal timer.

So a way to change the square's colour is required in order to safely collect the gems that he doesn't match, and that's where the coloured beams of light placed around each level come into play; passing through a beam will change the square's colour accordingly, allowing gem collection to continue. The game challenges players to work out the most time-efficient route between groups of gems and the appropriate times to use the beams, but this also needs to be executed without panicking as precious seconds tick away.

This is a Spectrum version of Electric Wolf's Xbox Live Indie game of the same name, which we also take a look at on page 106 of this issue. This conversion was put together by the prolific Bob Smith who has previously collaborated with Electric Wolf while converting that team's previous XBLIG titles *Noir Shapes* and *Miner Man* over to the Sinclair ZX81. A glance at the original game's screenshots reveals a simple and stylised graphical style that works remarkably well when converted to the Spectrum. So, even though it might look more primitive than other recent games and there's just a hint of colour clash, the result is pleasant and uncluttered. Sound is similarly simple: some good music for the presentation screens and spot effects during play, all driven by the Spectrum beeper.

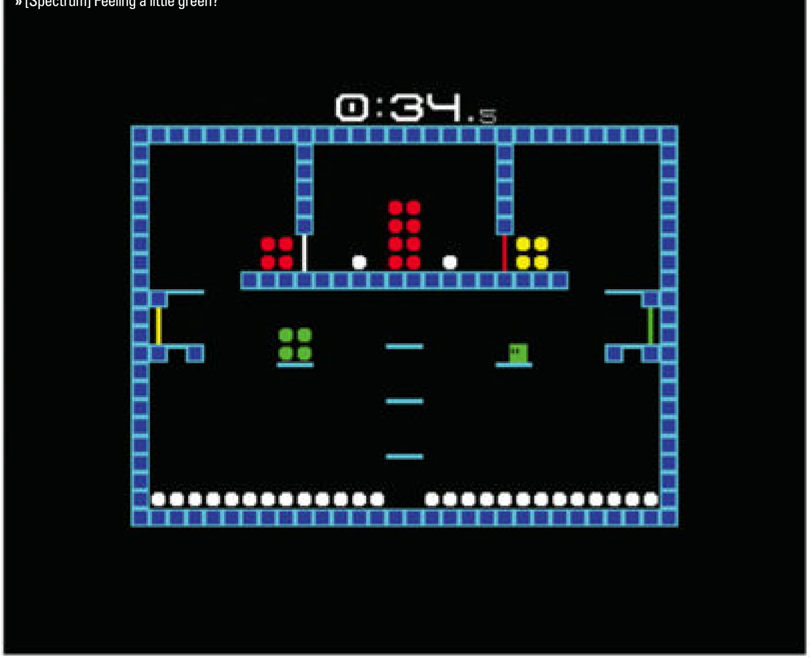


We found *Gem Chaser* to be a hugely challenging game because the time limits on each of the stages tend to be extremely strict. There isn't a lives or retries counter to limit how many times each stage can be attempted until it's completed but, until the optimal route is discovered and even after that point if it isn't executed quickly enough, running out of time with just a few gems left in play is a frustratingly common occurrence despite some stages being given a slightly more generous time limit than the original.

Gem Chaser really isn't a game to be attempted by players who suffer from high blood pressure and there isn't a way to save the current state of play out, as with the Xbox 360 original, so turning the Spectrum off will lose any hard-earned progress. Therefore playing the game with an emulator that offers the option of stashing the current state out rather than real hardware might well be advisable in order to spread the game's significant challenge out over a series of playing sessions.

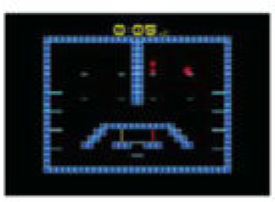
85%

» [Spectrum] Feeling a little green?

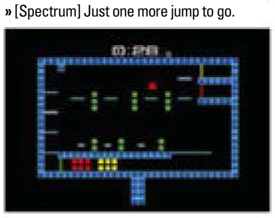




FORMAT: SPECTRUM,
DEVELOPER: BOB SMITH
LINK: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/GEM-CHASER-SPEC
RELEASE: 2013
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



» [Spectrum] Just one more jump to go.



» [Spectrum] I got 28 seconds to flow.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

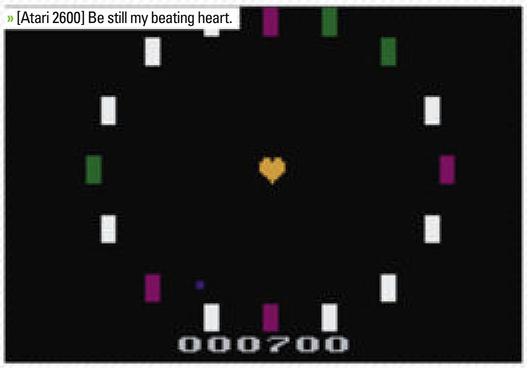
HEARTBREAK

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 2600 » **DEVELOPER:** CYBEARG
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/HEARTBREAK-2600 » **PRICE:** FREE

Some people are said to wear their heart on their sleeve, but in *Heartbreak* it can be seen beating loudly in the middle of the screen. The huge heart is also surrounded by 16 coloured bricks and when the fire button is pushed, a projectile takes on the heart's colour and gets launched. The direction of fire isn't controllable, but moving the joystick will rotate the ring of bricks so that an appropriately coloured one can be positioned to take the hit.

There are four different play modes that are selectable from the title page and the reaction between the ball and bricks varies depending on which is chosen, with colour playing an important role throughout. In some modes, for example, the bricks need to be removed from the playfield by similarly coloured balls; in others they must be turned white by adding an extra colour to their mix. Despite not having an in-game timer, *Heartbreak* is a fast-paced and occasionally frantic game with a surprising amount of variety that's entertaining to play. Interesting and surprisingly addictive to boot.

78%



» [Atari 2600] Be still my beating heart.







» [Amstrad CPC] They're altogether ooky.

INVASION OF THE ZOMBIE MONSTERS

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** RELEVO GAMES
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/ZOMBIE-MONSTERS-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE

The zombies are coming and Ned, who has just won the school science fair with Linda, sees the woman he loves dragged away by a huge, shadowy creature. However, for some unexplained reason, the moonlight has given our geeky hero the powers required to save the girl, and indeed humanity, from the clutches of the undead and picking up the items left behind by destroyed enemies will power him up further as long as they're collected when the right colour.

Invasion Of The Zombie Monsters for the Amstrad CPC is a *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*-style push-scrolling platform-based shooter and a port of the MSX and Spectrum game we looked at in issue 81. The slightly jarring scrolling system has survived the conversion – this time moving the landscape in four-pixel steps since the graphics have been redrawn for mode 0 – but, as before, it doesn't seriously detract from the experience. So *IOTZM* is, overall, a nicely presented action game with a steep but not off-putting difficulty curve.

83%

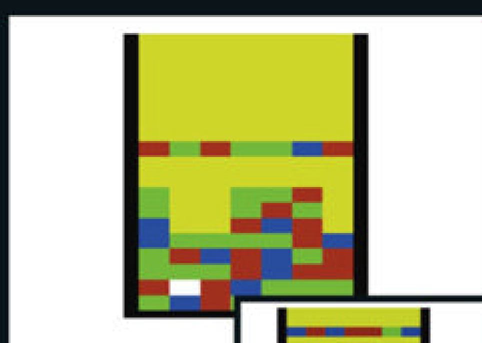
TETWELS

» **FORMAT:** VIC 20 » **DEVELOPER:** OPBYTE
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/TETWELS-VIC » **PRICE:** FREE

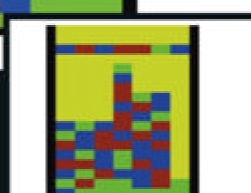
The name *Tetwels* is a portmanteau of *Tetris* and *Jewels* and the game itself takes some inspiration from both, with the latter having the greater influence. The objective is to make columns of three tiles with the same colour, but the game launches entire rows of tiles which the player can only rotate left or drop. And so the challenge lies in quickly spotting all the possible options a row offers and choosing the one that does the least damage elsewhere on screen.

The idea here is interesting, but *Tetwels* suffers on the implementation front; adding the ability to shift the falling row *right* as well as left would certainly have helped, as would mapping the controls differently to prevent the drop key being hit by accident. We played the 8K compiled version most because it's more responsive, while the slower unexpanded BASIC iteration is more sluggish but easier to get into.

71%



» [VIC 20] Well, well, well… three holes in the ground.



» [VIC 20] Look what you're doing when you put me down.

WHAT'S BREWING?

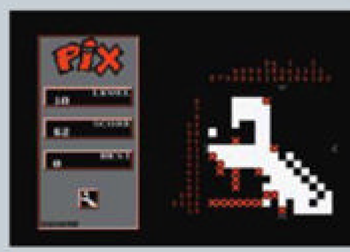
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Plus/4] A huge pain in the asteroids!

>> ROUND THE BEND

Developer Norbert Kehrer has been busy again, this time with a conversion of his impressive *Asteroids Emulator* to the Commodore Plus/4. The sound is a little weaker than in previous iterations, but the game is just as playable. **http://kikstart.eu/asteroids-emu-264** has the rock-smashing download while the C64 version behind **http://kikstart.eu/asteroids-emu-c64** has been tweaked to give it a speed boost.



» [Amstrad CPC] Here's one I prepared earlier.

>> TOTALLY PIXELLATED

Fans of nonogram-based games such as *Picross* now have a new option for the Amstrad CPC. *Pix* was written by CPCWiki forum member EgoTrip. For the uninitiated, the objective is to create a pixellated image based on the clues supplied. It's a bit like drawing character graphics on graph paper but working from someone else's design. **http://kikstart.eu/pix-cpc** goes to the CPCWiki thread; read through for the most recent download.



» [Amiga] Fight, fight, fight!

>> ROUND ONE, FIGHT!

Although the Amiga has the excellent *IK+*, for some reason the original *International Karate* never received a conversion. So Meynaf, who has previously ported Atari versions of *Super Sprint* and *Gauntlet*, has moved the ST version over. The Amiga is basically running the ST code and translating the output on the fly, so the game runs slowly unless on a speedy Amiga, but it is at least playable now. **http://kikstart.eu/ik-amiga**

HOMEBREW

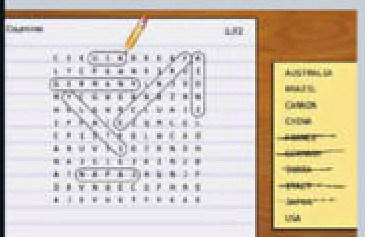
>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

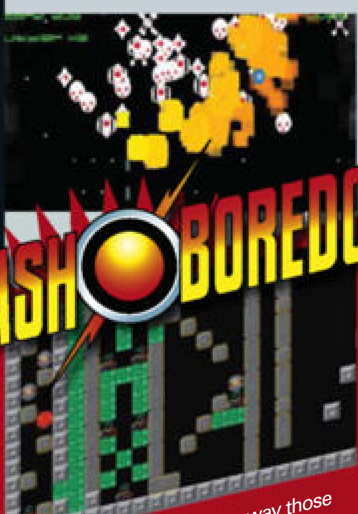
>> I LEFT IT HERE SOMEWHERE

Talk about old school… absolutely nobody will be surprised to hear that Xbox Live Indie game *Word Search* is a simulation of the pen-and-paper puzzle game. A list of words with a common theme are hidden in a ten-by-ten letter grid and the player has to find and circle all of them with their electronic pencil to move on to unlock later lists. We've given it a quick try and *Word Search* is both relaxing and frustrating in fairly even measure. **http://kikstart.eu/word-search-xblig** takes you to the XBLIG store page.



>> IT GOES ON AND ON

In the future where *Eternal Carnage* is set, genocide on the telly is the only thing keeping humanity from dying of sheer boredom. This Windows game is a fairly simple gallery shooter that throws loads of enemies at the player, demonstrating that televised genocide is, apparently, repetitive. We've given this a quick blast and it's tough but fun. Head to **http://kikstart.eu/eternal-carnage-pc** to see the future of reality TV.



FLASH BOREDOM

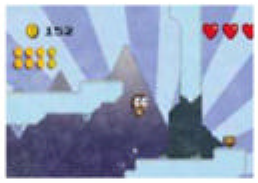
Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on ***Retro Gamer's*** Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Supaplex**.

SUPAPLEX IS A CLONE OF ATARI 8-BIT CLASSIC BOULDER DASH. AVOID BEING CRUSHED OR TRAPPED BY THE BOULDER-LIKE SPHERES, COLLECT AS MANY 'INFOTRONS' AS POSSIBLE AND ESCAPE THROUGH THE EXIT. MORE CHALLENGES WILL BE UNLOCKED AS THE GAME PROGRESSES, BUT SURVIVING EVEN THE EARLIER STAGES WILL PROVE QUITE TAXING! HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/SUPAPLEX-FLASH

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…

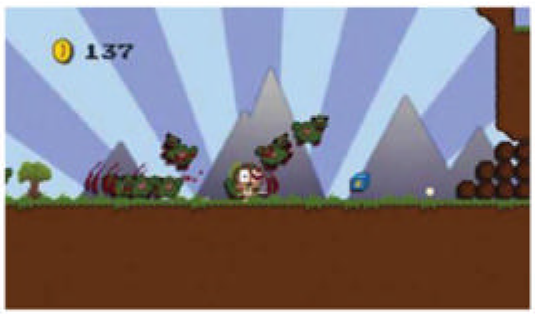
DLC QUEST LIVE FREEMIUM OR DIE

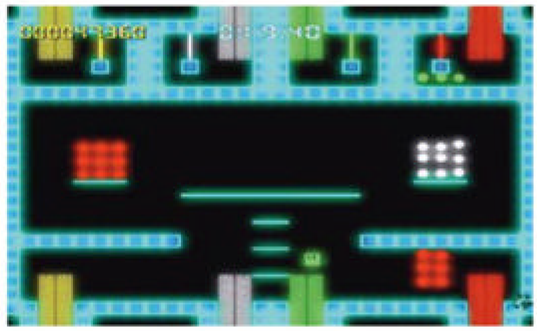
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/DLC-2-XBLIG



DLC Quest Live *Freemium Or Die* is a scrolling platformer which satirises several aspects of indie and mainstream gaming. Normally standard features like checkpoints, wall jumping and the ability to move left, along with less useful options like a Canadian language pack or parallax scrolling, have to be unlocked and then purchased from the shopkeeper with collected coins.

Gaming in-jokes include most of the NPC conversations, the appearance of in-game advertising and one point where the game temporarily stops and pretends it can't get a server connection. It may poke fun at various genres, but *DLC Quest* is no joke, being a satisfying platformer in its own right. This is a standalone expansion, so we'd recommend the original *DLC Quest* as well.



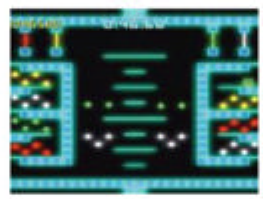


GEM CHASER

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/GEM-CHASER-XBLIG

We've looked at the Spectrum conversion of *Gem Chaser* on page 104 and the Xbox original is pretty much the same game but with more movement and glow effects on the stylised graphics. The gameplay of *Gem Chaser* is about finding the optimal route through each screen to collect every single gem within the (often tight) time limit, passing through the colour-changing beams where required.

Gem Chaser is a seriously tough game because the time limits for each stage are painfully tight, but it doesn't limit the number of attempts on each stage. The Xbox 360 version also has one feature lacking on the Spectrum: the current game status can be saved, so working through the numerous tricky levels doesn't have to be done in a single sitting. This makes a massive difference, especially on the more frustrating stages. Tough, but enjoyable.



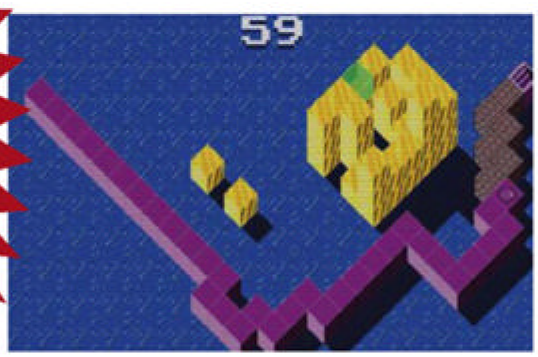
MOFLOS

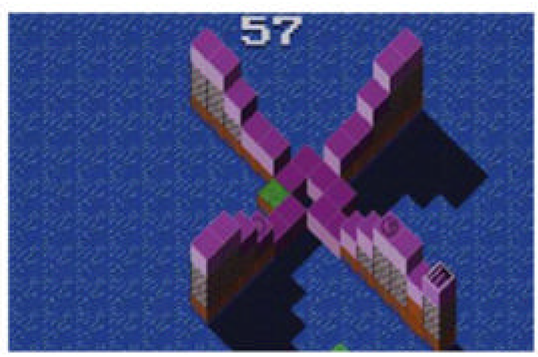
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/MOFLOS-PC

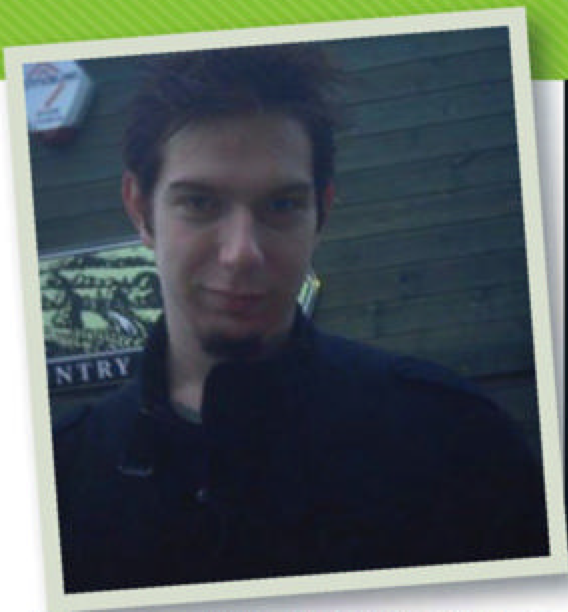
Moflos are cute little bubble-like creatures that spend their days bouncing around and eating apples. They're also daft as brushes and, even when they're aware that there's danger around them, will still stick to some simple rules of movement. If they can go forwards they will – which means they'll bounce onto hazards like boiling lava if left unattended – and if not they'll turn right 90 degrees until *they can* go forwards. Moflos will also climb up or down as long as the difference in levels is just one block.

Using these rules and the blocks of ground supplied, the player has to guide the perplexed-looking creatures to the safety of the exit, represented by a staircase. Is sounds easy enough, but after a couple of relatively simple stages to get things moving, the layouts become far more challenging. Once a block has been bounced on, it turns purple and can no longer be moved, so some stages are about grabbing the resources or bonuses before they're rendered useless while others are a race against time to save the Moflos before they wipe themselves out.

If the timer runs out on a level or it has to be restarted, an apple is lost – once they've all been consumed, the game is over. There are occasionally apples slightly off the beaten track to collect and an extra one is awarded for each 5,000 points scored.







HOMEBREW HEROES

LAST MONTH WE LOOKED AT THE XBOX LIVE INDIE TITLE CHRONOBLAST AND ENJOYED WHAT WE PLAYED; THIS TIME WE HAVE A QUICK CHAT ABOUT THE FUN BLASTER WITH ITS PROGRAMMER STEVE REDMOND

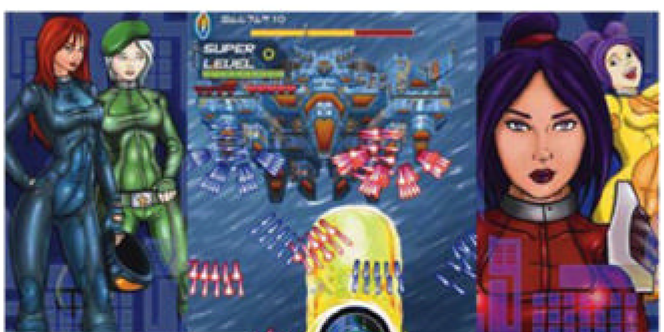
Q&A

First of all, what were your inspirations for *Chronoblast*?
Chronoblast draws inspiration from *DoDonPachi* graphically and we're not really shy about admitting that since there's a lot of love for shooting games within n0rty games, particularly Cave games. It's not just Cave though: we've drawn inspiration from other companies too. I'd say *Chronoblast* is a letter of love to companies before us and it falls somewhere between the offerings of Cave and Psikyo.



» [Xbox 360] Now that's bullet hell.

And what standout features does *Chronoblast* have?
One of the biggest features is the support for vertically orientated monitor setups. This allows players to play the game with that true arcade feel! We've even had players running it in Xbox-based arcade cabinets, which is really flattering. Beyond that, we also offer a peer-to-peer high score system to get around the limitations imposed by XBLIG.

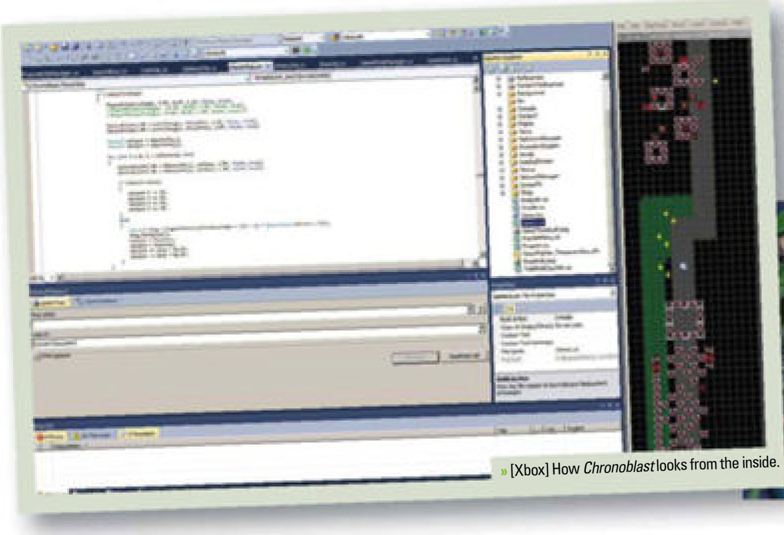


» [Xbox 360] 4:3 ratio, just like the arcades.

How many people were involved and how long did it actually take to create?
It started out with just me and Kevin. I think between jobs, moving house and everything else involved we managed to clock up about two and a half years. We also enlisted the voice-acting talents of Kara Edwards, famed for her role as Goten and Videl in *Dragon Ball Z*. Since then, we've made contacts with other artists (Ben Douglas, Pieter Visser) who were crucial in getting the game out of the door.

Are there any moments that stand out during the development of *Chronoblast*?
You mean apart from the pounding headaches and near heart attacks upon release?! When you've spent so long on a project, it's hard to pick out specific points. There's been so many days of hard work and stress plotting and testing level design, for example. That part always took forever, as every time I had to change mechanics – I also had to check the levels were still valid for the scoring system. My favourite parts of development were usually when I'd get non-shooting game enthusiasts to test out the game at work. Seeing their faces with a mixed expression of joy and sheer terror was always great.

I'd also have to highlight the point where I began to realise people were showing a serious interest in the game. When you start getting mentions on high-profile indie-focused websites, for instance, it really fills you with a great feeling of reassurance.

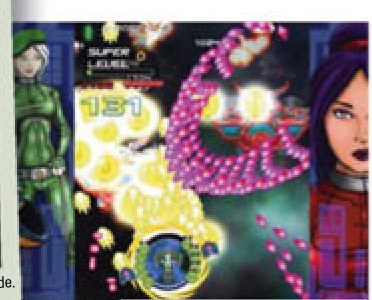


» [Xbox] How *Chronoblast* looks from the inside.

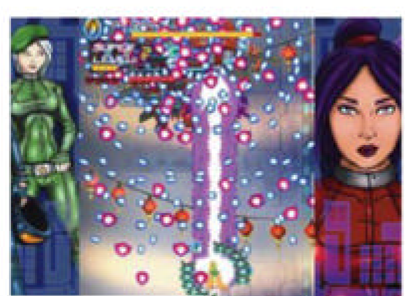
And is there perhaps anything you would have done differently with hindsight?
The *Chronoblast* codebase went through so many iterations. It was a 16:9 vertical scroller at one point, then I began to refine it into the game it is today. I'm glad I didn't stick to the game plan from day one for this title and it's definitely taught me a valuable lesson for future games. Coming up with ideas is easy, but implementing them can take so much longer!

Finally, what are n0rty games' plans for the future? Any new projects you can tell us about?
There's a few shooting games on the back burner that I really want to finish. *Skyravens*, a horizontal scroller, along with various 3D games in an arcade style. I really want to get those done as gifts to the community before I move on to other genres. But I have a suspicion I'll always have a strong desire to keep making retro arcade games. So never rule out the appearance of another shooter.

Heck, who am I kidding? Other genres are only there to make the money to feed the shooting game addiction – right?



» [Xbox 360] Pretty colours everywhere.



» [Xbox 360] Dodge those bullets!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

STAR LETTER

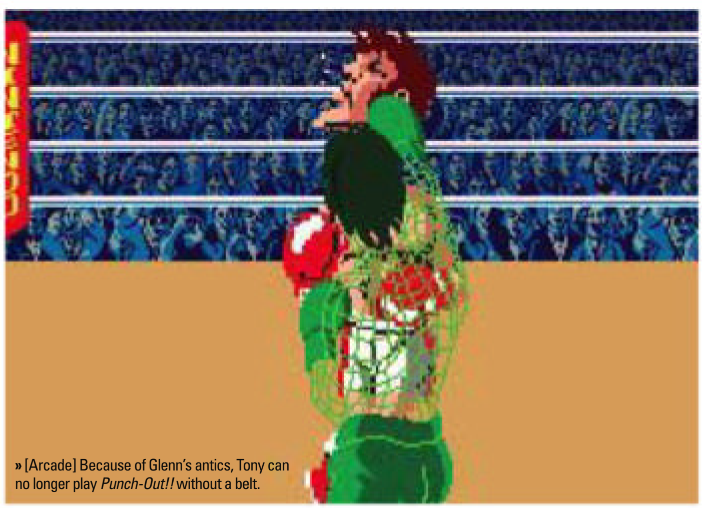
RETRO GRAFFITO

Dear Retro Gamer,
Our fair town of Cork City, Ireland, has always been a stronghold of culture and artistry of all sorts. But recently, it seems, we've been given a hefty dose of pop-culture all over our fair city, with some anonymous hero paying street-art homage to the golden era of gaming at landmarks and side streets. He's been here for a while, apparently, striking at night. Whoever this is, he/she's a hero. Check this stuff out and tell me he doesn't deserve a Star Letter. I should only hope, that's if he/she reads this, that a *Strider* piece is on the way!
Mike

Considering the artist in question clearly has a fondness for Capcom games, perhaps Darran's kindred spirit could find himself becoming a firm artist fixture of Cork City's street culture. Thanks for sending in the picture. You're right, it is worthy of this month's Star Letter – even though you didn't paint it. Or did you?



» Visit Cork City's famous miniature Mega Man display. Better be quick though, before they all get picked away.



» [Arcade] Because of Glenn's antics, Tony can no longer play *Punch-Out!!* without a belt.

PUNCH-OUT!!, PANTS-OFF!!

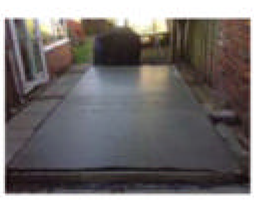
Dear **RG**,
I need to tell you about this time me and my friend Glenn visited the arcade, and it's fair dinkum, 100% true, so listen. See, what happened was, Glenn told me about this trick that never failed; you get a gas stove igniter (or 'clicker' as they'd call them at school) and go around to arcade machines, firing them off at the coin boxes, and some would apparently start up and give you free credits. This supposedly infallible plan was reason enough for us both to take a day off school and visit the city, so off we went on that bright Monday morning. It was quite busy downstairs so we went up to the second level, which was empty, and proceeded to initiate our strategy. Needless to say, pretty soon we found things weren't working out to plan and with frustration kicking in we started, well, getting stuck into the machines physically, starting off with a few well-placed elbows, but before too long employing flying side-kicks and double hammer-fists with gleeful abandon. This one machine seemed to reply; it kept saying things like "Body blow! Body blow!" which we found hilarious and only later on realised was *Punch-Out!!* It made Glenn laugh so much he pulled my pants down as a prank and just at that very moment a super-hot chick came up the stairs and saw me in all my glory, to which I simply stood there and grinned, flicking the clicker coolly and asking her out for a date, to which she hastily replied "yes!" and soon after we got married and she took care of us both with her runway and modelling work. OK, OK, so that last bit was not *quite* true but the REST WAS and it was one of the best days of my life, even though I had to, sadly, pay for all the games I played dammit. Thank you so much for your time,
Tony 'Thunderpants' Velovski

Thank you for brightening up our day with your amusing tale, Tony. It just goes to prove, you shouldn't always believe the words of someone with a penchant for pant-pulling related pranks. It will only end in marriage to a wealthy runway model.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Shed Heaven

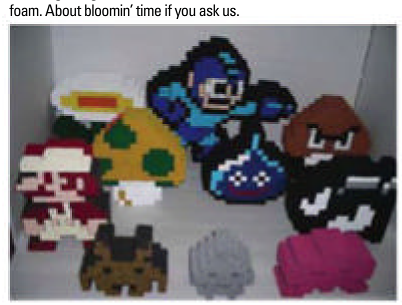
Darran's bought a shed. Of course, being Darran, this shed is no ordinary shed. It's a super shed, big enough for him to transform it into a woody entertainment paradise that will home a pinball table, various game consoles and probably him for a very large chunk of his life going forward.



FOAM TECHNICIAN

Hello **Retro Gamer**
I thought you thought might like to see the sculptures I've made out of foam. I started with Mario, but then moved on to Mega Man, *Star Wars*, *Dragon Quest* and beyond. Why Hitchcock popped into my mind I'll never know, but who knew he likes hanging out with Mario? If you'd be interested in one for the office, let me know which character you'd like and I can make one for you. I can make most 8-bit characters; they would need to be huge if I go for anything 16-bit or higher – there are just too many pixels at that point. The foam comes in only one size, so anything too advanced would end up being like 5 feet tall. Feel free to publish any photos and my Flickr address. I've loved **RG** since issue 6; wish I could get my hands on 1-5, but eBay prices are a bit out of my range. Keep up the phenomenal work.
Thanks,
Jesse Dubinsky

» Retro gaming heroes immortalised in foam. About bloomin' time if you ask us.



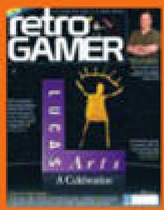
The sculptures look great. We'd love Head and Heels, or maybe even the two spies from *Spy Vs Spy*. Either would make rather natty bookends.

SCHOOL AMAZE

Dear **RG**,
I've been an avid reader of **RG** since its early roots and it always thrills me to learn interesting facts within every issue. I'm so happy that the magazine didn't slide down that route of just describing retro games, as it could easily have done. Instead you provide exclusive information on the games that I enjoy and it's why I'm still buying the magazine to this day. One surprising bit of info that I've learned from reading **RG** over the years is the age of the game

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

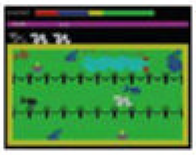
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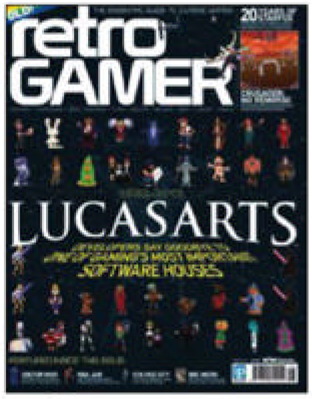
designers way back in the Eighties – in some cases they were my age – just schoolkids. (*Wriggler* article, issue 114, for example). Now that really amazed me that my peers were designing these games that I enjoyed playing so much. If I'd have known that at the time, I'd have had a go at programming a game and who knows, I might have been interviewed in **RG**! So a big thank you **RG** for revealing 'the wizard behind the retro gaming curtain' and I look forward to reading more interesting facts that you uncover.

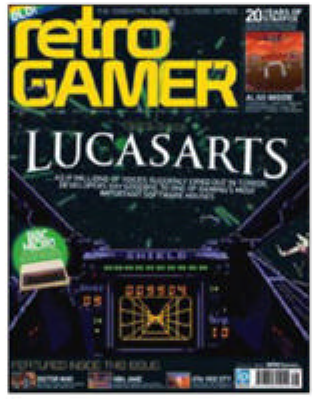
Martin Dodd

It never fails to amaze us too that the authors of some of our favourite retro games were just schoolkids when they wrote them. When we were at school we busied ourselves daydreaming about Belinda Carlisle, avoiding bullies and rushing home to play the games written by (as we later discovered) enterprising kids from other schools.

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . .

This issue's covers that nearly happened







DARRAN

Long-time readers may remember that we did a similar cover to this one for issue 62. Leading that issue of **RG** was a big feature about the Mega Drive and so we decorated the cover with various Mega Drive sprites. We tried a similar thing here with LucasArts characters, but ultimately it felt too busy.



STUART

Star Wars is a big and iconic part of LucasArts, so it became an obvious choice for a cover option. This was the only *Star Wars*-only cover we put forward. As you can see, it's the X-Wing cockpit from *Super Star Wars* with a bespoke background our designer put together. It's a nice idea but felt like a *Star Wars* cover.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…



What's your favourite LucasArts game?

jdanddiet
The original *Jedi Knight* because for the first time it actually felt like you were in a *Star Wars* game, and it had John Williams' fantastic music.

The Laird
For me it has to be *Ballblazer*, although *Rescue On Fractalus!* runs it pretty close. The Atari 7800 version in particular is stunning and a great example of what that machine can do in the right hands. The Grid Theme is one of my favourite chip tunes from the 8-bit generation.

lebopski
Got to be *Day Of The Tentacle*. First game I ever played after receiving my Soundblaster one Xmas. Watched the intro (can still quote it word for word) and picked myself up off the floor around Boxing Day teatime.

ncf1
Monkey Island 2: Le Chuck's Revenge. The entire direction of adventures changed after this and so many attempted to replicate it, better it or match it and none even came close. The most influential adventure game of all time in my opinion.

PaulEMoz
Grim Fandango. Yeah, so it was a bit clunky sometimes. But the amazing atmosphere, superb storyline and brilliant characters combined to make a truly memorable gaming experience.

antsbull
For me it is definitely *Rogue Squadron 2: Rogue Leader* – a game that still looks and plays brilliant today, 12 years after it was released. The first *Star Wars* game that completely fulfilled the promise of putting you in the *Star Wars* movies, and it actually being like it was in the movie. Getting to take on Star Destroyers in the Battle of Endor and then fly through the innards of Death Star #2 was unbelievable for a *Star Wars* fanboy.

HalcyonDaze00
Impossible to split *Monkey Island 1* & *2*. Two genuine all-time classics and they still have the best cast of characters we have ever seen in gaming.

AmigaJay
Monkey Island without a doubt.

Mayhem
Flibble… erm… let's go with *TIE Fighter* on the PC. Massive depth, highly challenging, Emperor's Hand missions, and as repeatedly proven, it's more fun to play as the bad guys.

snowkatt
Jedi Academy for me, even though I am probably in the minority on that one (again).

Spacepatrol
Zak McKracken. I spent hours putting the nose-glasses on and taking them off again.

pantal00ns
Would go for *Outlaws*. Was into my FPSs around that time, and let's face it, it's the Wild West! Spaghetti westerns and in particular Mr Eastwood may have had an influence.

retro GAMER

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Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
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13 issue subscription UK – £51.90
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Printing & Distribution
Printed by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, Bentalls Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex, CM9 4NW
☎ 01621 877 777

Distributed in the UK & Eire by: Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
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Distributed in Australia by: Gordon & Gotch, Equinox Centre, 18 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086
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Distributed in the Rest of the World by: Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
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THE INVADERS ARE COMING!



As Space Invaders turns 35, we interview the creator of the long-running franchise and discover how its impact helped change our industry forever

Also inside...



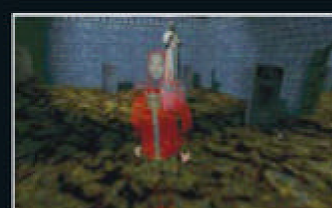
Master System

■ Our latest hardware guide is devoted to Sega's 8-bit console and explains why it's still so desirable to collectors.



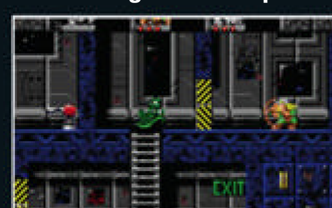
Capcom

■ We revisit the cream of Capcom's numerous popular franchises as the Japanese publisher turns 30.



Thief

■ Key developers reveal how they turned the stealth genre on its head to create their astonishing PC masterpiece.



Lost Vikings

■ Blizzard's quirky co-op game remains one of the company's best 16-bit titles. Its designer Ron Millar explains how it all happened.



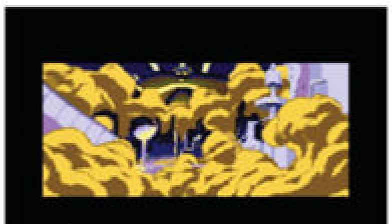


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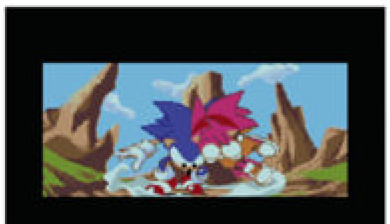
SONIC CD

» Considered by many to be one of Sonic's greatest outings, Sonic CD saw the nippy cobalt blue hedgehog dash, jump and spin through an epic platform adventure that punctured the fabric of time as well as the videogame sound barrier. Bookended by some attention-grabbing animated cut-scenes, this is how its good finale played out



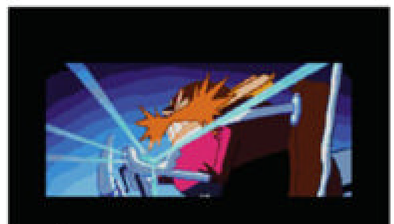
01

» After Sonic finally defeats Dr Robotnik (aka Dr Eggman), the mad scientist's planetary base starts to crumble. Sonic quickly realises that it's time to make a speedy exit, but not before making a heroic detour.



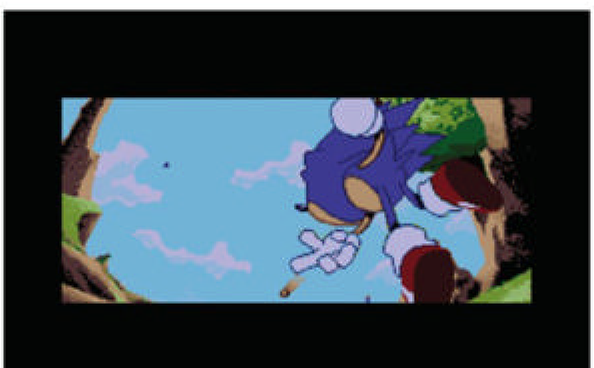
02

» Sweeping pink-haired love interest Amy Rose into his arms, Sonic jumps from the smoke-leaking base and falls to terra firma safely. There's no way Robotnik could have escaped in time – he's a big lad...



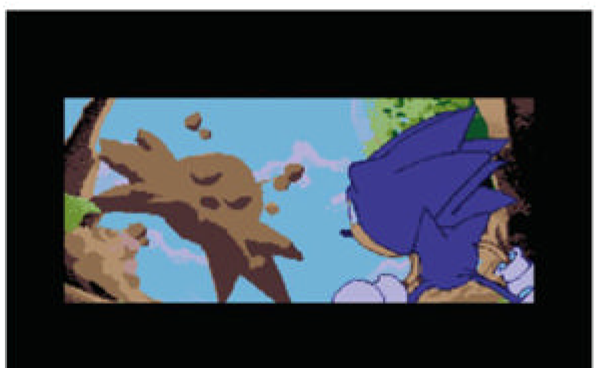
03

» Of course, Robotnik has escaped. He always manages to get away in order to annoy Sonic again in the next game. Riding high inside his gazillionth flying machine, it looks like he's going to escape with an emerald in tow.



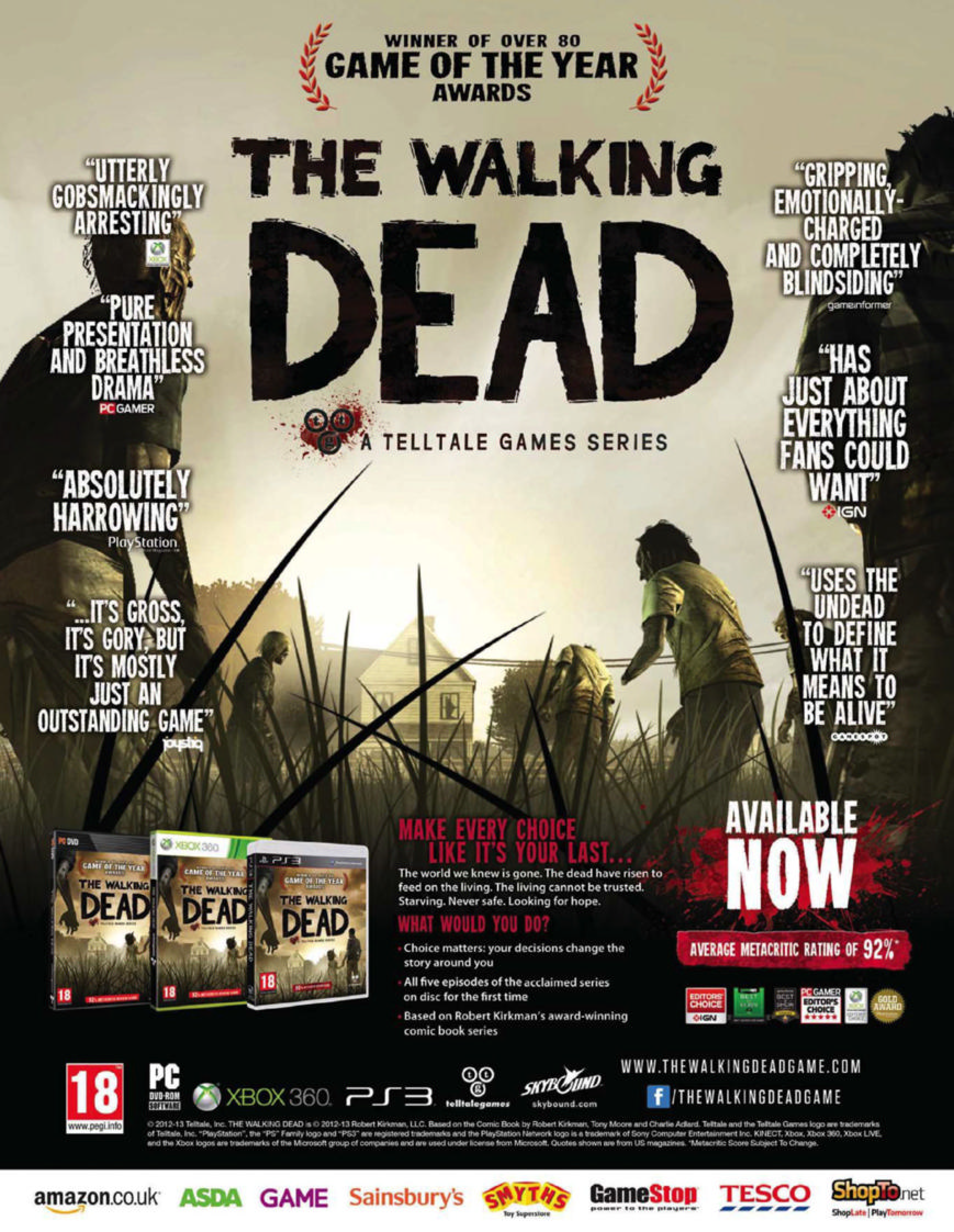
04

» Realising Robotnik is escaping and thinking on his feet, Sonic picks up a stone from the floor and then starts spinning on the spot to charge up his throw. Letting it go, it rockets towards Robotnik, who is oblivious to what is about happen.



05

» Well, that is until it strikes the contraption and blows it to smithereens – filling the sky with a clay statue of an octopus. Or is it a smoke cloud in form of Robotnik's cephalopod-shaped head? It's definitely one or the other.



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